

# **The Regional Municipality of York**

Committee of the Whole  
Planning and Economic Development  
March 7, 2019

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

## **Economic Development – 2018 Year in Review**

### **1. Recommendation**

The Economic Development – 2018 Year in Review (Attachment 1) be posted on the [york.ca](http://york.ca) and [yorklink.ca](http://yorklink.ca) websites and circulated by the Regional Clerk to local municipalities, local chambers of commerce and boards of trade, ventureLAB, York Region Arts Council, York University, Seneca College, the Workforce Planning Board and Toronto Global.

### **2. Summary**

This Report provides a summary of the Economic Development – 2018 Year in Review publication, which highlights economic activity in the Region and the impact of York Region programs on business and job growth.

Key Points:

- York Region continues to be a top destination for business growth as a result of its strong labour force supported by on-going urban infrastructure investments
- Regional research, marketing, innovation and business advisory programs, delivered collaboratively with local municipalities and business stakeholders, have contributed to business growth and success
- Regional business advisory services have facilitated close to 3,700 new and expansion jobs across the Region since 2010
- The Economic Development Action Plan, which guides all Regional economic development programs, will be updated and presented to Council later in 2019

### **3. Background**

#### **Business and job growth are fundamental to the Region's success**

Economic vitality remains a strategic priority and cornerstone for building a prosperous Region. The importance of a strong economy is identified in strategic guiding documents of Council, including Vision 2051, the York Region Official Plan, 2010 and the Strategic Plan.

Business and job growth are fundamental to the Region's economic vitality and quality of life. Attracting and retaining a variety of high quality jobs across a broad range of sectors promotes economic resilience and helps ensure those living in York Region have the opportunity to work where they live.

#### **The Council-approved Economic Development Action Plan guides business-support programs and activities**

Council approved the Economic Development Action Plan 2016 to 2019 on January 21, 2016. [The Plan](#) guides the economic development activities of the Region and outlines programs that explore the Region's economy and business needs, connects businesses into a network that promotes innovation and growth, and shares success stories with audiences to generate interest and excitement both within and outside York Region. The Plan calls for Council to receive an annual update on business activity in the Region and the impact and results generated by Regional programs.

### **4. Analysis**

#### **York Region job growth outpaced national, provincial and GTA labour force employment growth**

The Toronto economic region (represented as the GTA in Table 1) continues to be one of the fastest growing urban areas in Canada. The 2016 Census estimated total employment in the GTA is over 3.5 million jobs. A significant portion of this employment is accommodated within large municipalities in the north, west and central areas of the GTA, including York Region.

Employment growth in York Region outpaced national and provincial employed labour force growth at 2.4% between mid-year 2017 and mid-year 2018. Over the past five years York Region has grown at an average annual rate of 2.6%, outperforming average growth rates in the national (1%), provincial (1.2%) and GTA (1.6%) economies. Growth rates in the national economy appear to have peaked and are widely expected to moderate through 2019-2020 according to TD Economics.

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Annual Labour Force and Employment Growth Rates: Canada,  
Ontario, GTA and York Region, 2013-2018**

|                           | Canada      | Ontario     | Greater<br>Toronto<br>Area <sup>1</sup> | York<br>Region <sup>2</sup> |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 2013-2014                 | 0.5%        | 0.5%        | -1.5%                                   | 1.4%                        |
| 2014-2015                 | 1.0%        | 1.1%        | 4.3%                                    | 2.6%                        |
| 2015-2016                 | 0.4%        | 0.5%        | 0.9%                                    | 3.7%                        |
| 2016-2017                 | 2.1%        | 1.8%        | 1.4%                                    | 3.0%                        |
| 2017-2018                 | 1.1%        | 2.0%        | 2.8%                                    | 2.4%                        |
| <b>5 year<br/>average</b> | <b>1.0%</b> | <b>1.2%</b> | <b>1.6%</b>                             | <b>2.6%</b>                 |

Source: York Region Planning and Economic Development Branch, 2018 and Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey, 3-month moving average, unadjusted for seasonality, ending in August 2018

<sup>1</sup>Greater Toronto Area labour force employment growth approximated by the Toronto Economic Region

<sup>2</sup>York Region figures based on 2018 employment survey results and estimates for home-based, farm-based, and no contact businesses

## **York Region is a top business destination**

York Region is located in one of the most attractive and vibrant economic areas in North America and is well positioned to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities in the economy. The Region's economy is supported by core attributes of strong population and employment growth, a skilled labour force, a high quality of life that attracts talent, established and diversified industry clusters, major infrastructure and transportation investments, and locational and accessibility factors, amongst others.

## **York Region's major infrastructure investments are a catalyst for economic growth**

The Region's commitment to infrastructure investments and transportation expansion is enabling business growth. Viva bus rapid transit and the Spadina Subway extension into Vaughan support tremendous office and residential construction and business attraction. Regional Council continues to place a priority on future infrastructure improvements such as the Yonge subway extension that will support new business opportunities.

As the Region's urban structure continues to evolve and the Regional Centres and Corridors mature, these core attributes combined with the Region's office real estate, digital broadband infrastructure and innovation, help maintain and promote York Region's continued competitiveness as a top business location in the Greater Toronto Area.

## **Many factors impact businesses' ability to grow and prosper**

York Region is not an isolated economy, and local business and employment growth are closely tied with external economic conditions, trends, and government policies. Examples of external and macro-level factors that have a direct impact on York Region's economic growth prospects include exchange and interest rates, costs of doing business (e.g. hydro rates, corporate taxes, labour force costs, etc.), business regulations, the labour force pool (e.g. educational institutions, immigration etc.), business incentives, U.S. and global trade agreements, and capital markets. York Region's continued shift toward a knowledge-and-services-based economy is an example of the impact of such external factors.

## **Regional programs support growth of local businesses and jobs**

Job growth is a key priority of Council and the delivery of regional Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction (BRE&A) advisory services is a key program undertaken with local municipalities and service delivery partners. York Region's Economic Development Action Plan addresses key economic challenges and opportunities facing York Region and translates them into economic action areas for programs.

In collaboration with local municipalities and a network of business partners, York Region's Economic Strategy division provides services in the areas of business advisory, economic research, innovation, and investment attraction marketing and sales. Innovation and business expansion/attraction are supported region wide via the Region's Investment and Marketing York Link campaign and the Strategic Economic Initiatives programs. Entrepreneurship services are delivered in York Region's northern six municipalities by the York Small Business Enterprise Centre (YSBEC).

Regional BRE&A advisory services are focused primarily on knowledge-based sectors and customized to client needs. These services augment and extend the reach of corporate call programs undertaken at the local municipal level by leveraging the regional network of service delivery partners. Business advisory services include marketing support through York Link to facilitate corporate public relations and talent attraction, corporate introductions across municipal boundaries, domestic business attraction outreach and sales, in-market export connections, and expert support with government programs in the areas of hiring, training, research and development, and export. Regional staff also provides small business and entrepreneurship advisory services in the Region's northern six municipalities through the YSBEC.

## **Regional business advisory services facilitated the creation of about 3,700 new and expansion jobs across York Region since 2010**

Since 2010 regional BRE&A advisory services in collaboration with local municipalities facilitated the creation of about 3,700 new and expansion private sector jobs across York Region. It also helped retain thousands of local jobs as companies regularly assess their location options related to operational and talent attraction needs.

In 2018 York Region's business advisory teams engaged over 800 businesses and entrepreneurs and delivered 250 in depth BRE&A consultations. YSBEC delivered core small business consulting services to hundreds of clients, as well as the "Starter Company Plus" program with funding from the Ministry of Economic Development Job Creation and Trade. In total, 17 YSBEC clients received \$85,000 from the Starter Company Plus program in 2018. The YSBEC Summer Company program also produced positive results in 2018 with the 12 participating students learning about everything from market research to sales and business planning. The YSBEC participated in Staples Day on July 4 and the student businesses gained exposure through CBC Radio Canada and local media.

The attached '2018 Year in Review' highlights key business updates from across York Region last year, including some of the success stories facilitated through regional programs.

### **Partnerships are key to support business growth across the Region**

York Region staff also facilitated business advisory initiatives undertaken by local municipalities and support Toronto Global in its mandate to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and York Region. In collaboration with the Province and other stakeholders, York Region continues to support ventureLAB, the Regional Innovation Centre that helps entrepreneurs grow globally competitive companies.

York Region's Economic Strategy division maintains an extensive network of business advisory partners and multipliers in both the private and public sector to facilitate BRE&A. An example is the collaboration with the Council of Canadian Innovators (CCI) to support the growth and policy advocacy needs of local technology scale ups. In 2018, work with CCI included targeted business introductions and a CEO business roundtable led by CCI Chair and former Blackberry CEO Jim Balsillie.

In collaboration with York University/Yspace and the Small Business Enterprise Centres in Richmond Hill, Vaughan and Markham, YSBEC co-developed and delivered a 12 week entrepreneur certification program (Founder Fundamentals), training 40 entrepreneurs.

### **Marketing through 'York Link' facilitates business growth and retention in York Region's knowledge-based industry sectors**

Launched in mid-2016, the York Link marketing strategy promotes York Region as the place "Where Talent and Opportunity Intersect." It reinforces direct-to-business advisory services with robust dedicated digital media platforms, regional scale marketing initiatives, and leverages content and competitive value propositions developed through on-going business and economic research. York Link is focused on building awareness of York Region as a destination of choice for knowledge-based employers, particularly in office locations in and around the Region's centres and corridors. It showcases the Region as a place where businesses thrive in a fast growing and urbanizing environment by having access to the right resources, within communities that offer a desirable lifestyle for skilled professionals.

York Link has become a recognized brand within the business community in the Region and GTA. York Link's social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn) grew in 2018, as follows:

- Total number of followers in 2018 reached 22,000 across platforms, representing an 18% year over year increase
- Content posts on the channels in 2018 generated 2.2 million user views (Impressions) and 27,240 user engagements
- York Link's website generated 33,000 visits in 2018 with 106,300 total Page Views

York Link's social media channels continue to demonstrate direct impact on business decision makers with meaningful third party message amplification and endorsement by private sector companies, business leaders, and upper level government agencies.

### **The Region also engages in awareness building initiatives beyond York Link**

Notable marketing initiatives beyond York Link in 2018 included:

- Leveraging the Region's corporate digital channels, which combined have more than 67,000 followers and subscribers
- A feature story in MaRS' latest 'Wired Different' technology magazine, distributed by Invest Canada at Web Summit in Lisbon, the world's largest technology showcase
- Collaboration with local chambers of commerce and boards of trade in hosting the annual Colossal Chamber Networking Event
- Showcasing York Region's technology sector opportunity at the 2018 'Toronto Tech Summit' in downtown Toronto

Regional staff also initiated a project with the City of Toronto, local municipalities and the private sector to showcase York Region's technology eco-system at North America's fastest growing technology event - Collision Conference – that for the first time will move from the U.S. to Toronto in 2019.

### **Entrepreneurship and innovation continues to be important to support business and job growth**

The Economic Strategy program continues to include entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives that support development of a strong economy. These include:

- Delivering the 4th Annual Broadband and Innovation Summit and the second Fintech summit, attracting more than 450 attendees from more than 200 organizations.
- York Region was named to the ICF Top 10 Intelligent Communities around the world with a population over one million.
- Overseeing the launch of YTN Telecom Network Inc., now York Net.

- Supporting ongoing efforts to secure funding from the Federal Connect to Innovate (CTI) to enable improvements in broadband connectivity for York Region's rural communities and the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation.
- Collaborating with York University to deliver three networking events at the YSpace Innovation and Entrepreneurship Hub. This connected local employers with York University's experiential learning education programs in support of the Markham campus.
- Through the York Small Business Enterprise Centre (YSBEC), collaborating with the small business enterprise centres in Richmond Hill, Vaughan, and Markham, along with York University/YSpace, to develop and deliver a 12 week entrepreneurship certification program called Founder Fundamentals. Through this initiative 40 entrepreneurs received training and thirteen were awarded grants totalling \$65,000.
- Two success stories from the YSBEC Starter Company Plus program in 2018 included:
  - PhysActiv Sports Medicine: owned by an accomplished registered physiotherapist with limited business experience. Through the program, he was able to expand to additional locations, improve marketing and connect with additional clients.
  - Moregidge: a consumer-first digital mortgage platform for mortgage brokers and agents. With assistance of the program, Moregide developed a business plan and received training, mentoring, and a \$5,000 grant. Moregridge has since closed their first investment of over \$500,000, partnered with Finastra, Teranet, and Nationwide, and won People's Choice Award at the York Region Fintech Summit.
- Hiring an Agriculture and Agri-Business Specialist and collaborating with Environmental Services in delivery of the first Agri-Food Networking Forum in Vaughan, attended by 55 agri-food stakeholders, including processors, retailers and food service organizations.
- A total of 190 York Region companies took advantage of ventureLAB services including events, workshops, clinics and mentoring. In addition, nine York Region companies were able to raise \$18M in public and private funding with ventureLAB support.

## **A proposed update to the Region's Economic Development Action Plan will be presented to Council later in 2019**

The Economic Development Action Plan is updated with each new term of Council. With the approval of a new Strategic Plan and four year budget, it is appropriate to revisit the current Action Plan to ensure alignment with Council priorities and the ongoing Municipal Comprehensive Review that includes the review of Vision 2051 and the Regional Official Plan. Several local municipalities have updated, or are in the process of updating their local economic development plans. It is important to continue to ensure the Region's Action Plan aligns with and supports local priorities. Work is underway to review the Economic Development Action Plan and a report will be presented to Council in 2019.

## **5. Financial**

Costs associated with the Economic Strategy program and Economic Development – 2018 Year in Review publication are included in the approved Planning and Economic Development division budget.

## **6. Local Impact**

Local municipalities are key delivery partners of the Region's Economic Strategy program. The goals and actions developed in the Economic Development Action Plan 2016 to 2019 are designed to complement local strategies, initiatives and messaging. The Region and local economic development offices work together on program development, delivery of events and joint client servicing when appropriate. The Region and local economic development offices meet three to four times a year along with other key program delivery partners to coordinate activities and share best practice. Local municipalities will also be consulted and local plans considered during development of the updated Action Plan.

## **7. Conclusion**

York Region continues to be an attractive place for residents and businesses to locate and invest. The Region, in partnership with local municipalities and other economic delivery partners, has made an impact on this success through business supportive programs. The attached Economic Development – 2018 Year in Review document highlights economic activity and the impact of York Region programs on business and job growth.

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For more information on this report, please contact Doug Lindeblom, Director, Economic Strategy at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71503. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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Attachment (1)  
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