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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Community Growth and Economic Development Committee
From: Commissioner of Community Growth and Economic Development
Report: #2025-EDT-1
Date: January 7, 2025

Subject:

2024 North Durham Building Business Forum

Recommendation:

That the Community Growth and Economic Development Committee recommends:

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of the North Durham Building Business Forum event that was held on October 22, 2024.

2. Background

2.1 The Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Section of the Economic Development and Tourism Division (Invest Durham) delivers economic development programming and initiatives in the Townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge (north Durham).

2.2 This team led the planning and implementation of the 2024 North Durham Building Business Forum to bring together entrepreneurs and small business owners from across north Durham to create connections, share useful information and knowledge to help them grow, and to provide information on business services and supports from Durham Region business support organizations.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 The 2023-2027 Growing North Durham: Rural Economic Development Action Plan was received by the Planning and Economic Development Committee on February 7, 2023 ([Report 2023-EDT-2](#)).
- a. The re-introduction and hosting of the North Durham Building Business Forum was a key action identified under the “Support Entrepreneurship” goal of the [plan](#).
- 3.2 The 2023 North Durham Building Business Forum was held on November 14, 2023 ([Report 2024-EDT-3](#)).

4. North Durham Building Business Forum

- 4.1 The 2024 North Durham Building Business Forum was held in-person on October 22, 2024, from 4 to 8 p.m. at the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation Health and Resource Centre.
- 4.2 The event welcomed 114 attendees from a wide range of commercial and home-based businesses, business support organizations and north Durham municipalities (staff and members of Council).
- 4.3 Attendees were served a plated dinner showcasing local ingredients, prepared by a Brock-based caterer.
- 4.4 Kim Wheatley, Ojibwe Anishinaabe grandmother from Shawanaga First Nation, and a member of the Turtle Clan, led a Smudging Ceremony.
- 4.5 The primary goals of the event were to build knowledge and capacity amongst north Durham business leaders by organizing useful and informative speaking sessions aligned with goal areas and actions in the Growing North Durham Plan (“Welcome New and Diverse Businesses” and “Foster the Innovation Economy” goal areas); facilitate networking opportunities for attendees; and provide businesses with valuable information on support services available from local and regional business support organizations.

4.6 The following elements were built into the event to help achieve the desired goals:

a. Speaking Sessions

- Navigating the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Landscape: Understanding Opportunities & Risks for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises – Keynote session delivered by Dr. Peter Lewis, Canada Research Chair in Trustworthy AI, Ontario Tech University
- Beyond Compliance: Leading with Inclusion in the Workplace – Panel discussion moderated by Allison Hector-Alexander, Director, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Region of Durham, featuring the following panelists: Anthony Lue, athlete, speaker and accessibility consultant; Dr. Meghann Lloyd, Professor at Ontario Tech University, Senior Associate at Grandview Children’s Centre, and member of Durham Region Accessibility Advisory Committee; and Terry Vos, Owner, Vos’ Your Independent Grocer and Board Member, North Durham Chamber of Commerce

b. **Networking Opportunities:** Attendees were offered the opportunity to network with other entrepreneurs, small business owners and support staff at multiple points throughout the event. The number of opportunities were increased this year, based on feedback received after the 2023 event.

c. **Business Support Organization Tradeshow:** More than ten business support organizations with a presence in Durham Region set up information booths at the event, allowing attendees to learn about the services they offer, ask questions, and connect with staff.

4.7 Following the event, a post event survey was circulated to attendees. Key highlights include:

- 95% of respondents said that the event met or exceeded expectations.
- 95% of respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the format of the event.
- 71% of respondents said they would ‘definitely attend’ another North Durham Building Business Forum. An additional 22% said they would ‘probably attend’ another.

5. Relationship to Strategic Plan

5.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham region Strategic Plan:

- a. Economic Prosperity: To build a strong and resilient economy that maximizes opportunities for business and employment growth, innovation and partnership.
- 3.1 Position Durham Region as the location of choice for business
 - 3.2 Leverage Durham's prime geography, social infrastructure, and strong partnerships to foster economic growth.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The 2024 North Durham Building Business Forum was successful in bringing together north Durham business leaders to share knowledge, ideas, resources and information.
- 6.2 The Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Section will continue to focus on delivering on the goals of the Growing North Durham Plan in 2025 and will explore other actions to foster north Durham's entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- 6.3 This report will be circulated to the Townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE
Commissioner of Community Growth and
Economic Development

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer