



REPORT

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

TO: Mayor and Members of Council

FROM: Stacey Jibb, Manager, Agriculture & Rural Economic Development, Planning and Economic Development Department, Durham Region

DATE: June 28, 2021

REPORT: DS- 42/21

FILE NO.

SUBJECT: Uxbridge Economic Development Advisory Committee Business Visitation Program Overview

PURPOSE:

This report is intended to provide Council with an overview of the Uxbridge Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) Business Visitation Program.

BACKGROUND:

Uxbridge EDAC Business Visitation Program

The Uxbridge EDAC provides advice and recommendations to the Council for the Township of Uxbridge on matters relating to the attraction, development and retention of all businesses in the Township, support community economic development initiatives and assist with the staff level economic development function. The committee is comprised of business leaders from a variety of industry sectors and geographic areas of the Township.

Aligning with the EDAC mandate and annual workplan, a business visitation program was launched in 2019. This program involves EDAC members connecting with local business owners across the Township through one-on-one interviews to determine their needs and satisfaction levels. Feedback received through interviews is forwarded to staff who respond with follow-up, as required. A summary of the feedback is collated for analysis by the EDAC to identify common themes and possible solutions.

A total of fifteen business visits were completed since late 2019. These visits included businesses in rural and urban areas of the Township across a variety of sectors including retail, agriculture, manufacturing, professional services, food, and service industries. Participating businesses varied from being in operation for only a few years to being in operation for more than 40 years in the Township of Uxbridge.

Seven business visits were conducted by EDAC members in late 2019 prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, while the remaining eight were conducted in 2020 after the commencement of the pandemic. Business visits conducted during the pandemic were adjusted to include questions specifically related to COVID-19 and the impacts that it has had on business. Interviews were conducted primarily over the phone to align with public health measures.

While there is concern surrounding the short and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the small business community, the overall attitude surrounding the Uxbridge business climate is positive.

After completing an analysis of the survey results, the EDAC highlighted the following key results:

- Ongoing support for businesses to identify and navigate COVID-19 resources
 - o Businesses noted it would be helpful to receive information about COVID-19 resources.
 - o Targeted outreach and follow up has been underway since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic to assist businesses with accessing COVID-19 supports and resources.
 - o Information is available through www.investdurham.ca/covidresponse
 - o Several promotional campaigns and targeted marketing have been underway and regular updates are provided at each EDAC meeting.
- Rural Broadband
 - o Several businesses interviewed were dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with their internet/broadband speed and availability.
 - o Under the direction of the Region's Broadband Specialist, several initiatives are underway to improve connectivity specifically in north Durham. This includes the construction of a fibre trunk from north Pickering to Uxbridge
 - o Information about broadband initiatives and announcements can be found at www.investdurham.ca/broadband
- Public Transportation
 - o Businesses identified concerns with the public transit services available.
 - o The Region of Durham has altered many rural transit routes to On-Demand Transit
 - o The Economic Development Division will continue to work with Durham Region Transit to raise awareness of the On-Demand Transit program through social media posts, newsletter articles, printed posters, and other means of communication.

Conclusion

Overall, local business owners are satisfied with doing business in Uxbridge and are positive about the Township of Uxbridge as a place to do business. Looking forward, the EDAC plans to continue to perform business visitations throughout the Township. The Uxbridge EDAC, Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC), Downtown Revitalization Committee and the BIA are currently working together to create a standardized Business Survey. This will be the first step in a long-term effort to conduct interviews

with Uxbridge business owners and develop an inventory of data that can be analyzed and compared over time using the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Qualtrics database. As the Downtown Revitalization Project enters the 'Data Collection' stage, EDAC members may wish to participate by conducting interviews with downtown businesses. The EDAC will continue to work with appropriate stakeholders to ensure that business issues and concerns are being passed along to Council and staff.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT Report No. DS- 42/21 be received for information.
2. AND THAT a copy of this report be circulated to the Uxbridge Economic Development Advisory Committee, the Uxbridge Tourism Advisory Committee, the Uxbridge BIA, the Uxbridge Downtown Revitalization Project, the Uxbridge Chamber of Commerce and the Uxbridge Networking Group.

Submitted by:

Stacey Jibb, Manager, Agriculture & Rural Economic Development, Planning and Economic Development Department, Durham Region