

To: Economic and Development Services Committee

From: Anthony Ambra, P.Eng., Commissioner,
Economic and Development Services Department

Report Number: ED-25-04

Date of Report: January 8, 2025

Date of Meeting: January 13, 2025

Subject: 2024 Oshawa Economic Development Strategy Update

Ward: All Wards

File: 03-05

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Report is to provide an annual update on the progress of the Oshawa Economic Development Strategy (“O.E.D.S.”) to City Council as per the directive endorsed within [Report ED-23-213](#).

2.0 Recommendation

That the Economic and Development Services Committee recommend to City Council:

That Report ED-25-04 dated January 8, 2025 concerning an annual update from the Business and Economic Development Services branch be received for information.

3.0 Input From Other Sources

Not applicable.

4.0 Analysis

Business and Economic Development is a core service for the City. Oshawa has become a well-diversified economy with the growth of the healthcare, education and technology sectors. The overall goal of the branch is to further the transition of Oshawa’s economic landscape from a traditional manufacturing base to a more diverse modern technology and science-driven economy. This goal will endeavor to augment advanced manufacturing, and bolster City assets to position Oshawa for a continued substantial growth trajectory. Based on data from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs the City of Oshawa has approximately 75,000 jobs. The top five sectors by employment are Healthcare, Retail Trade, Educational Services, Accommodation and Food Services and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services. Over the past decade, the city has seen

significant growth in Professional, Scientific and Technical services, Finance and Insurance, Management, Construction and Information and Cultural Industries. Growth in these employment sectors further affirms the ongoing transition to knowledge-based industries as prominent employment sectors in the City of Oshawa.

Business and Economic Development Services drives the City of Oshawa's value proposition to the business and investment community with a focus on sustainable competitive advantages that help position and differentiate the City in a competitive investment market. The branch focuses on four key areas:

- Business Expansion, Retention and Sector Development
- Investment Attraction
- Marketing
- Entrepreneurship

Beginning in 2021 to present date, the branch has undertaken significant strategic and foundational work in order to be well placed to continue supporting the core mandates of the branch and innovating new ways to engage with existing businesses and attract investment to the community. While the branch has continued with legacy event offerings, annual publications and core services, it has also recalibrated in order to prepare for future opportunities and innovative programming that meets current needs of the economic landscape in the City.

In an effort to further support this transition and future state goals and objectives for the branch, staff presented the ten year O.E.D.S. to City Council in November 2023 through Report ED-23-213 for review and endorsement. Section 4.1 of this Report will provide an update to Council on progress that has been made within the first year of the strategy.

4.1 Completed Initiatives

From the time of endorsement of the Report, City staff, along with support from various community partners, have made positive movement forward in addressing the Council endorsed initiatives. Staff have completed actions within each of the five pillars within the O.E.D.S. The following actions have been completed, or are nearing completion, since endorsement of Report ED-23-213:

Pillar One: Economy and Employment

- Action 1.A.2: Develop Annual Business Engagement
 - Staff have worked over the past year to develop the scope of a formalized Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) program. The program includes four formalized stages which have been developed in cooperation with local economic development stakeholders to ensure positive value for the businesses that choose to participate. The four stages are Prepare, Collect and Analyze, Develop Goals and Action Plans, and Implement and Monitor. By the time City Council reviews this Report, stage two, Collect and Analyze, will be underway which will include a survey to businesses currently operating in the City and follow up site visits to those interested in participating. The goal of the program is to support the growth and

retention of Oshawa based businesses across the city through a data-based approach.

- Action 1.A.3: Promote Community Improvement Plans (C.I.P.)
 - As previously reported in [ED-24-75](#), a review of communication tactics to gain broader awareness and engagement relating to the C.I.P. program has been successful, using a mix of information sharing at the investment attraction stage and street level and digital communications to currently operating businesses. From 2016 to date, there has been a year over year increase in applications by 36%, with all applications for staff consideration being submitted to either the Urban Growth Centre C.I.P. or the Simcoe Street South C.I.P. Additionally, staff are seeing an increase in applications for both Conversion to Residential incentives and Brownfield incentive programs which may require a future evaluation of the funding level directed to the C.I.P. reserve.
- Action 1.A.4: Establish Business Educational Workshops
 - In October 2024, Business and Economic Development Services partnered with the Business Advisory Centre Durham (“B.A.C.D.”) to offer a free interactive workshop to downtown business owners to support their preparations for the upcoming holiday shopping season. With the forthcoming launch of the BR+E program, staff will utilize data obtained through this outreach to plan future educational workshops in partnership with local experts and service providers.
- Action 1.A.7: Drive Innovative Economic Reputation
 - In an effort to showcase and elevate exposure of examples where Oshawa is leading and emerging as a transformative, thought-based economy, Business and Economic Development Services staff partnered with the National Post in October 2024 to launch a feature titled “Discover Oshawa’s new era of tech innovation.” The story included an interactive economic assets map that included 41 points of interest relating to features that make Oshawa a desirable community to invest and operate a business in. Staff will continue seeking opportunities to engage new audiences to disseminate these key messages.
- Action 1.A.10: Establish and Strengthen Promotional Business and Economic Events
 - In an effort to further the impact of Action 1.A.7 noted above, staff have reimagined the annual Realtor and Developer Event, which was hosted in November 2024. With an aim to focus on quality, high-impact connections, staff developed a revised invitation list that targeted realtors and developers in the primarily industrial, commercial and institutional sectors across the G.T.H.A. that are active in the space but have yet to heavily engage in the Oshawa landscape. The event has resulted in follow-up meetings with the goal of establishing lead generation opportunities in the City.

- Action 1.A.11: Global Trade Campaigns
 - Through the Durham Economic Development Partnership, staff work directly with Invest Durham to facilitate and support all foreign direct investment projects. In June 2024, Invest Durham provided [Report 2024-EDT-10](#) to Regional Council regarding the 2025 Hannover Messe trade show. Hannover Messe in Germany is the world's leading annual trade fair for industrial technology. It welcomes exhibiting companies from all sectors related to advanced manufacturing, including mechanical and electrical engineering, research and development, digital industries, automotive, the energy sector, automation technologies, machinery, aviation and transport, and more. Approximately 4,000 businesses and organizations exhibit at the show annually with a booth. Invest Durham received endorsement and funding to participate in the trade fair and City of Oshawa staff will be supporting this delegation.

Pillar Two: Capital Infrastructure

- Action 2.A.1: Support Opportunities for Growth at the Port of Oshawa
 - City staff continue to support a collaborative working relationship with staff at the Hamilton-Oshawa Port Authority ("H.O.P.A."). Over the past year, City staff have worked directly with H.O.P.A. staff to support site selection options for prospective investors and have actively supported H.O.P.A. with action items required following their partnership announcement with Beowulf Electricity and Data Inc. to establish a new U.S. port in Somerset, New York.

Pillar Three: Real Estate

- Action 3.A.4: Update Community Improvement Plans
 - As updated under Action 1.A.3 contained within this Report, staff have supported a marked increase in applications to the City's C.I.P. programs. While the growth and interest in the program has been beneficial to support property owners and developers across the City, there is awareness that amendments to the C.I.P.s are required in order to meet the evolving needs of property owners and encourage high quality developments that in turn results in positive economic growth. A Report will be forthcoming to the Economic and Development Services Committee recommending amendments to the C.I.P.s to ensure funding categories are tied to highest and best use opportunities while also supporting the enhancement of the public realm.

Pillar Four: Growth and Expansion

- Action 4.A.1: Favourable Investment Environment
 - The City has many pre-established programs that promote a favourable investment environment for prospective businesses and developers including the waiver on City development charges for industrial developments City-wide and developments within the Urban Growth Centre, coupled with the existing C.I.P. programs. In an

effort to expand upon red-tape reduction strategies to facilitate positive developments, City staff presented Report [ED-24-91](#) which contemplated a series of technical amendments to the City's Zoning By-Law to increase density in particular areas of the City and consistently zone properties to promote the highest and best use business and development opportunities. City staff will continue to seek ways to reduce red tape and further Oshawa's reputation as a premier place to do business.

▪ Action 4.A.3: Articulate Value Proposition

- In 2023, staff in the Business and Economic Development Services branch launched an interactive Economic Data Dashboard. This open-source application aims to guide business and investment decisions utilizing real-time consolidated economic data. Over 50 metrics are continuously tracked and available for download. The intention behind this tool is to ensure that decision-makers have access to the information needed to make these decisions and demonstrate the attributes of the community more broadly.
- Business and Economic Development Services staff have continued to demonstrate the unique value proposition of the City through annual and ad-hoc publications including:
 - Community Profile
 - Development Insider
 - Investment Guide
 - Lead Facilitation Packages

In addition to these publications, staff are seeking ways to engage new audiences in an effort to clearly identify economic assets that establish Oshawa as a premier place to invest. This includes tools such as:

- Northwood Business Park Virtual Tour
- National Post Economic Assets Interactive Map
- A planned relaunch of the Tour of Growth and Development
- A planned video series to launch in late 2025 that focuses on story-telling from currently landed businesses and stakeholders in the economic ecosystem

▪ Action 4.A.5: Assure Investment Propensity

- This specific action item in the O.E.D.S. includes the need for strong after sales support to ensure smooth adjustment to the City and leverage additional opportunities. To ensure that staff within the branch are supporting existing businesses and new investors equally, the branch commissioned a new customer relationship management database that is specific to work completed in the economic development field. This database is a fully integrated system with branch staff that allows for comprehensive record keeping and data tracking and will facilitate support to businesses at any point in the relationship journey, including a focus on after sales support.

- Actions 4.C.1: Develop Comprehensive Marketing Material and 4.C.3 Brand and Promote Oshawa's Economic Engine
 - Through Report [ED-24-108](#), staff brought forward a visual brand identity for Business and Economic Development Services in alignment with the above noted O.E.D.S. action items. The new brand is a platform for opportunity. It uses powerful imagery to tell the success stories of Oshawa's entrepreneurs, businesses, and diverse sectors. The identity is versatile and adaptable, can be seamlessly used across various platforms and spaces and will make outreach more engaging and impactful. At its core, this brand powers and empowers. It celebrates the people and businesses of Oshawa. Each visual element embodies the City's diversity, creativity, and innovative spirit, showcasing the vibrant economy and strong sense of community that define Oshawa. The brand is also designed to resonate with long-standing local businesses while welcoming new enterprises from outside the City.

The graphics, photography and key messaging established through this development will further advance the above noted action items and provide a platform for investment attraction, storytelling and unique identity.

Pillar Five: Cultural Vitality

- Action 5.A.2: Expand Financially Sustainable Local Art, Cultural Events, Music Festivals and Theatre Productions
 - Within Action 5.A.2 there is a recommendation to commission public art installations to beautify public spaces and create a sense of cultural identity. Over 2024, Business and Economic Development Services staff successfully installed four new temporary public art pieces including works at:
 - South Oshawa Community Centre
 - John Aker Northview Branch
 - Mary Street Parkade
 - McMillan Parkade

Each of these artworks were created by local artists or students enrolled in art programming at Durham College. Staff continue to evaluate opportunities for new temporary and permanent public art installations and will report to the appropriate standing committee on future opportunities.

5.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications for the Economic and Development Services Committee to recommend to City Council to receive this Report as information.

6.0 Relationship to the Oshawa Strategic Plan

This Report responds to the Oshawa Strategic Plan Priority Area:

“Innovate: Vibrant Culture and Economy” with the goal to attract new businesses and support existing businesses and industry.



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