

Reaching economic development goals in King

By Mark Pavilons

Bolstering the municipality's economic development is a very fluid concept. Affecting economic change requires partnerships on many levels.

That was one of the messages contained in an update on King's Economic Development Strategy, now two years into its five-year projections.

Approved in 2013, the strategy is intended to set the direction and pace for economic development and help shape the local business climate, through 2018.

According to the report by Jamie Smyth, economic development officer, there has been "significant progress" made on several recommended action items. These goals and objectives, he pointed out, are not isolated to his department, but overlap with strategies in other departments.

"Economic development programming for King cannot be conducted in a vacuum. The municipality needs to leverage the resources and economies of scale necessary to achieve economic sustainability by collaborating and partnering with other organizations," Smyth wrote.

The strategy was implemented before the major announcement by Magna International to consolidate and relocate their international head office to King. This alone will have a major impact on King's economy when the more than 600 employees arrive in 2018 to their new home.

"This will have significant economic impacts on King City and the Township at large and create synergistic opportunities for suppliers and like minded businesses to invest and establish a presence in King," Smyth commented.

He further noted that the mid-term review of the strategy in 2016 will ensure the document remains relevant and on target to achieve the goals. It's recommended that staff undertake a thorough review and propose refinements to the strategy by fall of next year.

The collaborative approach is demonstrated with some key measures.

In 2013, King became a member of the Headwaters Horse Country initiative, a three-year partnership agreement that promotes the region as a destination and centre of equine excellence. This summer's Pan Am Games provided a lot of exposure for the region.

King plans to maintain its relationship with the Headwaters Equine Leadership Group, and staff will be looking at options to build on past successes.

Just recently, it was announced that Vianet will be building a high-speed Internet cable through King and this will have a very positive impact locally.

The King City Library received their connection through a York Region contract, exponentially expanding local services.

The King Campus of Seneca College is poised for a major expansion and when the first phase is complete, it will provide space for more than 5,000 students. By 2021, enrollment there is expected to top 7,000.

New business partners such as Coppa's and McDonald's, expected to arrive in 2016, have praised King Township and its staff for their cooperation.

Councillor Avia Eek praised Smyth for his work, noting all the pieces are coming together in King. York is a "big player" in the agri-food sector and Eek is optimistic positive economic forces will help move this sector forward as well.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini was pleased with what has been accomplished in such a short period of time.

"Just look at the stuff we're doing in economic development in this Township," he said.