

THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF GEORGINA

REPORT NO. SI-2024-0003

**FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF
COUNCIL**

February 28, 2024

**SUBJECT: 2024 TOWN OF GEORGINA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
TOURISM STRATEGY**

1. RECOMMENDATION:

1. That Council receive Report No. SI-2024-0003 prepared by the Economic Development and Tourism Division, Strategic Initiatives Department dated February 28, 2024, respecting the proposed 2024 Town of Georgina Economic Development and Tourism Strategy.
2. That Council endorse Attachment 1 of Report No. SL-2024-0003 as the Town's 2024 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy.

2. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the draft 2024 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy for the Town of Georgina, which outlines the goals and action items that are intended to guide the activities of the Economic Development and Tourism Division with the support of Town Staff over the next five years.

3. BACKGROUND:

The last Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan was approved in 2016 and since then the majority of action items have been completed or have evolved into ongoing initiatives. In addition, and as everyone is aware the economic climate has changed significantly over the last 7 years and the Global Pandemic resulted in a drastic change in business operations, some of these changes are here to stay particularly as it pertains to the need for the use of enhanced technology and online platforms to support e-commerce. And while Georgina was quick to react and put in place programs to support business during the pandemic, now is the time to develop a Strategy that reflects the nature of current business operations and the evolving economic climate. This new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (Strategy) will continue to support recovery but is intended to be forward thinking and proactive in the delivery of initiatives that support job creation, investment attraction and encourage activities that create an economic impact for our existing and future businesses.

With a proactive approach and vision for the municipality outlined in the 2023-2027 Corporate Strategic Plan, the Town seeks to be the most progressive, inclusive and vibrant growing community on Lake Simcoe, with a balance of rural and urban character. The creation and implementation of an Economic Development and Tourism Strategy was identified as a key action in the recently approved Corporate Strategic Plan and supports the goal of diversifying our local economy.

In the Spring of 2023, the Town retained McSweeney and Associates to oversee the development of a new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy that would outline strategic directions, goals and actions to guide the work of the Division over the next five years.

The development of the Strategy included qualitative analysis to understand the Town's economic and social situation and consultation with the community that resulted in engagement with 344 businesses, stakeholders, Town staff and residents.

Public engagement was conducted during the summer of 2023 and included one-on-one interviews, focus groups, a public open session and an online survey. The following key themes were identified and presented to the community during a one-day working session:

1. Lead, collaborate and communicate.
2. Be investment ready, business friendly and customer service excellence.
3. Understand and support the business community.
4. Development of tourism, culture and the arts.
5. Create vibrant downtowns.

McSweeney and Associates then worked closely with the Economic Development and Tourism Division to develop goals and action items that are realistic and can be commenced within the time frame of the Strategy.

The Strategy, which is closely aligned with the 2023-2027 Corporate Strategic Plan, is a living document that can be updated as required to meet Georgina's growing population and business growth and the changing economic climate and its potential impact on investment and business operations.

4. ANALYSIS:

Strategy Considerations:

The Town of Georgina is currently undergoing transformative and positive changes as its population and employment base grows. It is forecast to have a population of 70,500 and 20,700 jobs by 2051.

Recent and impending transportation improvements and the development of the Town's employment lands bring an opportunity to attract major investment that contributes to the non-residential tax base and supports local job creation for our residents.

While most of Georgina's businesses have less than 10 employees, their contribution to the economy is enormous and deserves equal focus. Collaborating with existing business owners and continuing to provide entrepreneurship programming is key to business expansion and retention.

Georgina's proximity to the lake and its tourism assets have established Georgina as a four-season tourism destination that has a year-round impact on the local economy. The tourism sector employs approximately one out of every 10 jobs in Georgina. A focus on growing existing assets and product development through the lens of collaboration and partnerships to provide opportunities for greater economic impact from the tourism sector will be a focus.

Goals and outcomes

McSweeney and Associates and Town staff developed the Strategy and its goals and actions through equal consideration of the Town's current and projected business climate and community engagement, establishing the following four goals:

1. Grow the economy through investment attraction:

To be achieved through investment-readiness and attraction efforts, listening to developers and businesses to improve processes, branding and collaborating with other levels of government to ensure Georgina has the infrastructure it needs to support investment.

2. Grow the economy through the retention and expansion of the existing business community:

To be achieved through enhanced connections, providing businesses with opportunities to grow through training programs and support, and working with other levels of government and organizations to address critical needs.

3. Grow tourism, arts and culture with a focus on leveraging these assets to create economic impact:

To be achieved through collaborations with private-sector businesses and stakeholders, wayfinding, public art and culture initiatives, event growth and increasing the number of visitors from outside of Georgina during the shoulder seasons.

4. Create lively downtowns and public gathering spaces:

To be achieved through infrastructure and beautification improvements, establishing and promoting events and enhanced connections with businesses.

These goals have more than 40 actions, some of which are highlighted below:

- Enhanced investment attraction efforts, including campaigns that highlight Georgina as the place to live, work and play
- Enhanced Business Concierge Program that assists investors through the development process and improvements to the non-residential development approval process and its timelines

- Formalized Business Visitation Program
- Continued Entrepreneurship programming support and potential post-secondary accreditation opportunities
- Evolving grant programs that meet current needs and provide the highest impact
- A dedicated tourism website that promotes Georgina’s existing tourism assets, including collaborative packages
- Increased public art installations and a formalized Film Program
- Wayfinding signage infrastructure

Measuring success

Progress updates and successes will be presented to the Economic Development Advisory Committee and Council annually in the first quarter of each year.

Success will be measured by:

Goal 1 – Grow the economy through investment attraction

The number of new businesses and development applications, the increase in ICI floor area and the employment growth rate.

Goal 2 – Grow the economy through the retention and expansion of existing business community

Entrepreneurship programming participation, the employment growth rate, increase in ICI floor area and the number of business visitations.

Goal 3 – Grow and diversify tourism, arts and culture with a focus on leveraging these assets to create economic impact

The number of partnerships, infrastructure improvements and events targeting audiences outside of Georgina.

Goal 4 – Create lively downtowns and public gathering spaces

The number of infrastructure improvements, events and participation, and findings from the formalized Business Visitation Program.

The Strategy is a “living document,” and the Economic Development and Tourism Division will make necessary changes to evolve the Strategy to address internal and external influences impacting the community.

Implementing the Strategy

The Economic Development and Tourism Division is in the process of finalizing an implementation plan focus, recognizing that additional resources will be required to implement all actions within the Strategy. As noted in the Strategy, immediate focus will be on those actions that can be completed, commenced or are ongoing and that do not require additional resources. It is also recognized that many of these actions are associated with activities that are being undertaken by other Departments.

5. RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

This report is aligned with the Corporate Strategic Plan’s goal to diversify our local economy through supporting investment attraction, job creation, business retention

and expansion, including within our agricultural sector, and the continuation to support Georgina's tourism sector as an economic driver.

6. FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY IMPACT:

Through the 2023 Budget Process, Council approved a budget of \$60,000 for the development of the Strategy.

While many of the actions can be accommodated through the existing budget, financial and staff resources will be required to deliver the Strategy in its entirety. Any request for resources related to actions within the Strategy (Attachment 1) will be provided to Council for consideration through the annual budget process.

7. PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND NOTICE REQUIREMENTS:

The Strategy includes the collaborative input of more than 344 residents, business owners, stakeholders, key staff and Council representing a diverse range of perspectives. This consultation process conducted through an online survey, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, an open house and a strategic working session with stakeholders, Council and staff to validate the themes identified through the initial engagement and qualitative research.

Upon approval of the plan's content, staff will move forward with a communication plan to foster awareness of the new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy.

8. CONCLUSION:

The Town of Georgina 2024 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy creates a vision for Georgina's future that, through a collaborative engagement process with the community, our partners, Council and Town employees, meets the unique needs of the community.

The four goals are reflective of the insights gained throughout the development of the Strategy and focus on investment attraction, business retention and expansion, tourism development and downtown revitalization. Implementation of the recommended actions will drive positive outcomes for Georgina's business community and its residents. Following Council approval, staff will finalize the implementation plan with key metrics to help track progress.

APPROVALS

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Recommended By: Shawn Nastke
Director, Strategic Initiatives

Approved By: Ryan Cronsberry
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment 1 – Georgina Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2024