

2020

ANNUAL REPORT



TOWN OF HALTON HILLS
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
INNOVATION & CULTURE



A MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Throughout 2020 – and since the onset of COVID-19 – Halton Hills has taken early, decisive and coordinated action to ensure that the Town remains ‘open for business’, supports existing businesses and markets itself as a prime investment destination.

2020 began with an expanded Economic Development, Innovation and Culture team and a robust workplan focused on strengthening businesses, growing employment and further enhancing quality of life in Halton Hills. However, the spread of COVID-19 quickly impacted both global and local economies in extraordinary and unprecedented ways.

Despite COVID-19, there were significant advancements on major projects within the Town’s Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division.

Over 25 new or modified initiatives were implemented in 2020 to position Halton Hills for an expedited recovery and continued economic prosperity.

This Annual Report serves to reflect upon and highlight the various initiatives and accomplishments of the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division over the course of a uniquely challenging and tumultuous year. We have made substantial progress, but there is still more to be done.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Bonnette". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

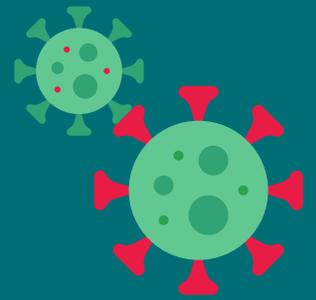
CONTENTS

HALTON HILLS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
INNOVATION AND CULTURE - ANNUAL REPORT 2020

1	COVID-19 Response
4	Economic Development & Tourism Strategy
7	Business Retention & Attraction (BR&E)
10	Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
12	Business Concierge Program
14	Tourism
16	Cultural Services
19	Affordable Housing
21	Conclusion



COVID-19 RESPONSE



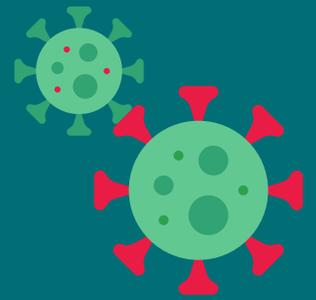
Since the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, Halton Hills' Economic Development division has taken early, decisive and coordinated action in close collaboration with other Town departments and key community stakeholders. This work is ongoing, as staff continues to respond to the pandemic and support the local business community.

The Town has implemented several COVID-specific business supports, as well as advanced and modified other important initiatives already underway. Over 25 new and modified initiatives have been implemented to position Halton Hills for an expedited economic recovery.

Many of the support and recovery initiatives that the Town has implemented were largely informed by feedback received from administering two surveys of the Halton Hills' business community. The initiatives are comprised of short-term actions to support immediate recovery efforts, as well as longer-term investment growth actions which will help sustain local economic growth post-pandemic. The new initiatives include:

- Establishing the Economic Support and Recovery Task Force to coordinate the local COVID-19 response;
- Launching the Al Fresco in the Hills temporary patio program to help supplement local restaurant revenues;
- Launching the new Visit Halton Hills website to amplify tourism's local economic benefits;
- Coordinating a Business Improvement Area (BIA) Levy Reduction Program for downtown Acton and Georgetown to reduce financial costs for BIA members;
- Supporting the expansion of online and e-commerce presence for 67 local businesses by administering the Digital Main Street program. 20 local businesses also received \$2,500 Digital Transformation Grants through the program;
- Launching a new Invest Halton Hills marketing video that showcases Halton Hills to attract new investment;
- Participating in the GTA Economic Development Alliance – a group of over 20 municipal economic development offices coordinating economic supports across the Greater Toronto Area;
- Expanding marketing and business engagement to gather data on local COVID-19 impacts and provide timely and relevant information to assist businesses in responding to COVID-19;
- Advocating on behalf of local businesses to the federal and provincial government on key issues via the Mayor's Office;

COVID-19 RESPONSE



- Supporting local businesses through the re-launch of a renewed ‘Shop Local’ campaign;
- Hosting two Halton Hills COVID-19 Arts & Culture Forums for the arts and culture sector to share their experiences, identify their needs and provide details on the recovery and support programs offered by the Town;
- Creating a new commissioning project, ‘The Artist Next Door’, for artists and arts and cultural groups to create new work in any artistic discipline that engages the residents of Halton Hills; and
- Launching, ‘Artrepreneur’, a new professional development program for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural not-for-profit staff and board members, to help equip them with vital business skills needed to grow creative businesses.

These new initiatives supplement a number of pre-existing actions highlighted throughout this document that were also amended to respond to COVID-19.

Combined, the actions taken represent a considerable investment by the Town and help position Halton Hills for accelerated economic recovery. Collaboration, advocacy and sustained effort have been the hallmarks of advancing Halton Hills COVID-19 economic recovery actions and initiatives. Moving forward, Economic Development staff will continue to assess the most current economic data available and continue to take proactive and coordinated action to respond to COVID-19 and support Halton Hills’ business community.

25+

**NEW & MODIFIED
INITIATIVES**

500+

**BUSINESSES
CONTACTED**

COVID-19 RESPONSE SMALL BUSINESS HIGHLIGHTS

AL FRESCO IN THE HILLS

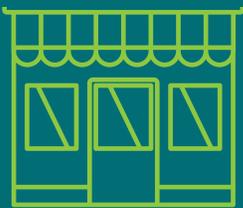
In June 2020, the Town launched Phase One of the outdoor dining initiative 'Al Fresco in the Hills', to help local food and drink establishments reduce revenue losses caused by necessary compliance with COVID-19 regulations. The program, developed by the Town in collaboration with the Economic Support and Recovery Task Force, provided eligible establishments the opportunity for additional outdoor dining capacity.

In the Fall, Phase Two of the program extended the agreements for patios on private property to January 1, 2021 and added warming options such as tents or heaters to help during the cooler months.



DIGITAL MAIN STREET PROGRAM

The Town received funding to support the local business community by working with main street businesses to expand and improve their online presence:



67 Businesses Supported



29 Businesses Started/Updated Online Stores



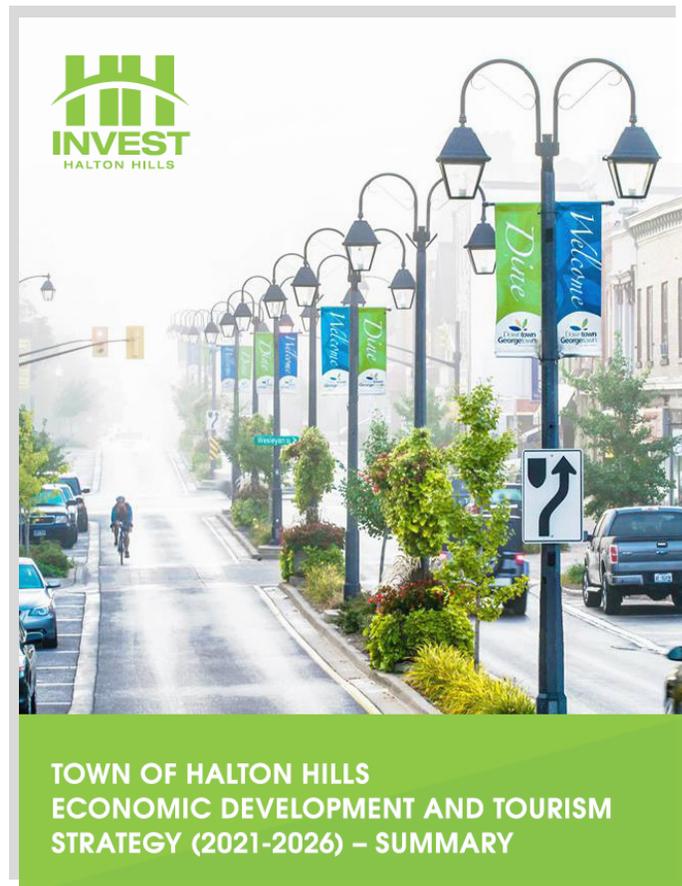
20 Businesses Received \$2,500 Grants

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM STRATEGY

Over the past three years, the Town's approach to economic development and job creation has shifted substantially. It is now more strategic, focused, impactful and proactive. By implementing a robust work plan, the focus has been on supporting existing businesses, attracting new investment, and marketing Halton Hills as a prime investment destination.

Since the Town's existing Economic Development Strategy was approved in 2012 and Tourism Strategy was approved in 2014, many demographic, technological and economic changes have taken place. In mid-2019, development of an updated and consolidated five-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy was undertaken to help ensure Halton Hills' long-term economic prosperity, support strategic decision-making, and grow local investment, jobs and non-residential assessment.

The updated Economic Development and Tourism Strategy continues to focus on enhancing Halton Hills' economic prosperity through a diversified and resilient economy.



The Strategy is actionable, comprehensive and leverages many successes achieved to date, as well as actions that are ongoing. It is comprised of 26 Goals and 137 recommended Actions, and it is a flexible and living document so that the Town can respond to changing market conditions in the wake of COVID-19 and any other major economic disruptions.

In the short-term, the Strategy addresses the immediate impacts of the pandemic. In the medium to longer-terms, the focus shifts to rebuilding and reimagining Halton Hills, addressing pre-existing challenges and identifying opportunities that will emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

STRATEGY COMPONENTS & OUTCOMES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM STRATEGY



- Builds on and leverages extensive cross-departmental and external stakeholder successes;
- Includes actions tailored for Halton Hills to address remaining gaps;
- Provides an actionable roadmap for strategic decision-making on economic development matters;
- Maintains and enhances the Town's economic competitiveness;
- Strengthens an 'open for business' approach;
- Supports local job growth and economic diversification;
- Maximizes the economic benefits from the tourism sector;
- Increases local investment, non-residential assessment, and improves non-residential to residential assessment ratio;
- Improves job quality (i.e. more professional/technical jobs offering competitive compensation); and
- Confirms key sectors of focus.

NEW STRATEGY BY THE NUMBERS

GOALS / OBJECTIVES

26

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

137

PREPARATION PROCESS



BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

The updated Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and the Foreign Direct Investment Attraction Strategy both established a roadmap of actionable items for the effective implementation of specific objectives to ensure the continued success of balanced assessment, new investment, job growth and tourism.

To support and complement these strategies, a comprehensive Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Strategy was established in 2020 to ensure that local businesses are supported through customer service excellence, expansion tools, connections and resources to remove barriers to growth and remain competitive in both local and global markets.

WHAT IS BR&E?

BR&E is a structured action-oriented and community-based approach to business and economic development. It promotes job growth by taking a proactive approach to identifying issues as well as opportunities for local businesses, and sets priorities for projects to address these needs.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY BENEFITS



JOB GROWTH

76-90% of new jobs come from existing businesses



BUSINESS EXPANSION

Provides business resources and supports



ISSUE REMEDIATION

Proactive supports to identify and address concerns and issues.



AMBASSADOR CREATION

Supports networking connections, builds resources and advocates for the Town



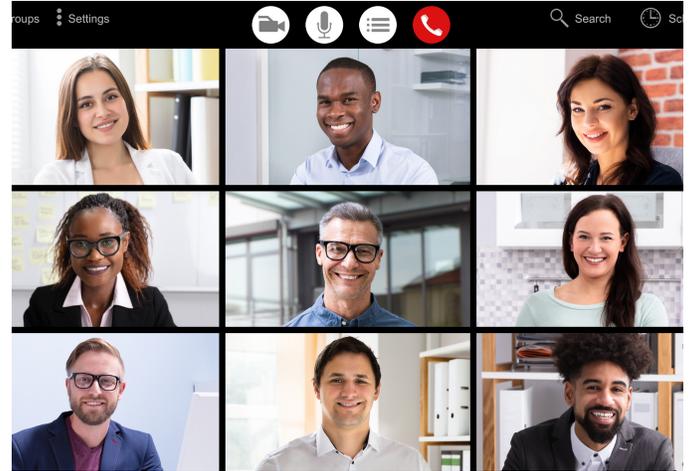
BUSINESS CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT

Develops programs and initiatives to support and react to industry challenges and economic changes

BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

The Town of Halton Hills BR&E Strategy leverages and builds on current initiatives, plans, connections and relationships. The success from the previous initiatives provided a positive business climate which produced a solid foundation from which to pursue a comprehensive and robust BR&E program.

In 2020, four key goals with 11 actionable objectives were identified as the basis for the BR&E Strategy and will serve to guide efforts and resources over the next two years.



GOALS

Encourage & Support Economic Growth:

- Provide opportunities for networking, external connections, partnerships, and business improvements to grow, innovate and encourage sustainability.

Business Engagement & Outreach:

- Build and maintain relationships with local Halton Hills businesses through customer service excellence.

Foster an Innovative Business Community:

- Ensure the Town is providing the tools and resources needed for business and employment growth.

Promote Halton Hills:

- Support the local economy through business and employment attraction and tourism initiatives.

ACTIONS

- Corporate Calling Program
- Contact Database
- Data Resourcing

- Community Improvement Plan
- Manufacturing Expansion Fund
- Business Concierge Program

- Small Business Supports
- Sector Innovation
- Collaborative Connections

- Promote Tourism
- InvestHaltonHills.com
- Marketing Campaigns



COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Town's current Community Improvement Plan (CIP) was approved in 2010 and has been successful at stimulating private sector investment, specifically for small businesses through building, façade and landscape improvement grants, as well as grants for environmental site assessments. After 10 years, the Town looked to build upon the existing program's strengths and successes, while exploring additional tools and incentives to stimulate broader community improvement, including by incorporating an affordable housing component into the updated CIP.

The main areas for consideration as part of the CIP Update include:

- Affordable Housing;
- Brownfield Redevelopment;
- Storefront/Main Street Revitalization;
- Agriculture/Agri-business;
- Heritage;
- Arts and Culture;
- Climate Change;
- Accessibility; and
- An Economic Assistance Program.

The review and update will result in a CIP that is modern, more universal, flexible and streamlined in its implementation. It will also allow for the potential inclusion of new and 'non-traditional' CIP programs including arts and culture, climate change, and through the consideration of an Economic Assistance Program. The new Economic Assistance Program will examine best practices, opportunities and the feasibility of introducing supports and tools to assist businesses during periods of significant economic hardship, including additional COVID-19-related supports.

The CIP update project launched in Fall 2020 and is expected to be completed by late 2021.

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

In 2019, Halton Hills began development of a five-year Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Attraction Strategy, accompanied by a three-year Action Plan in order to elevate the Town's global competitiveness. In March 2020, Halton Hills' first FDI Strategy was approved by Council.

The Town's FDI Strategy:

- Provides an actionable and business case-based roadmap for Halton Hills to be competitive and grow its local economy;
- Augments and aligns with regional, provincial and national FDI efforts;
- Recommends how best to raise awareness of Halton Hills' Unique Value Proposition in foreign markets; and
- Identifies and builds on strengths of the existing local business community.

FDI is part of the Town's comprehensive economic development efforts, and part of the Town's broader Economic Development and Tourism Strategy. FDI activities benefit local businesses, create quality local jobs, and attract net new jobs and investment. FDI is a key part of the Town's business continuity and investment attraction activities, as well as economic recovery initiatives post-COVID-19, with the goal to:

- Enhance Halton Hills' presence in the global marketplace;
- Ensure economic competitiveness;
- Increase the flow of foreign investment into Halton Hills;
- Grow local jobs and increase economic diversification;
- Create a more balanced assessment ratio; and
- Develop international partnerships with key stakeholders that will strengthen the Town's investment readiness and economy.

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the FDI Strategy began in Spring 2020 with the planning of two in-market trade missions, as well as the research and preparation of four industry-specific Investment Business Cases (IBCs) to highlight Halton Hills' investment opportunities for companies looking to expand internationally. Although COVID-19 caused in-market activities and physical trade missions to be delayed, implementation of the FDI Strategy continued throughout 2020.

In 2020, Town staff:



**Completed 4 IBCs
(Advanced Manufacturing,
Agri-business, Food
Processing & Clean
Technology)**



**Developed a list
of over 50 pre-
qualified foreign
company leads**



**Participated in two
international
virtual trade fairs**



All of of which allowed staff to develop a solid foundation for in-person trade missions in 2021.

In 2021, there will be continued focus on investment lead generation and pre-qualification, attending virtual tradeshows and building relationships that will strengthen future in-market activities.

There is much global uncertainty regarding COVID-19's impact on FDI. However, the Town is tentatively planning for two FDI delegations/missions in Fall 2021 to the identified target markets of Germany and Netherlands.

BUSINESS CONCIERGE

To stay competitive, maintain an ‘open for business’ approach, grow non-residential assessment and attract local jobs, the Town’s Economic Development, Innovation and Culture Department developed a Business Concierge program in 2020 that will streamline the delivery of key strategic economic development leads and projects.

In today’s competitive economic environment, the Business Concierge program will contribute to the Town’s long-term financial health. The Program will be a complimentary service offered by the Town’s Economic Development division that will assist projects from their conceptual beginnings and site selection, to completion and beyond.

GOALS

- Provide business owners, major investors and/or developers with a formal service that offers simplified and time-sensitive development process facilitation.
- Provide rapid and coordinated issue resolution through the convenience of a single point of contact.



OBJECTIVES

- Expedite development approvals;
- Provide an elevated customer service experience;
- Enhance the Town’s ‘open for business’ approach and ensure Halton Hills is a top-of-mind investment destination;
- Continue to improve inter-departmental and inter-agency collaboration;
- Identify and implement innovative solutions to issues;
- Grow the economy and benefit the Town financially; and
- Strive to continuously improve and leverage the Town’s strengths.

BUSINESS CONCIERGE PROCESS



1

Initial
Concept



2

Preliminary
Discussions



3

Pre-Application
Support



4

Application
Submission



5

Application
Review /
Expedited
Service



6

Project
Completion &
Continuous
Support

Projects will be carefully selected for the Business Concierge stream based on a number of eligibility criteria, as well as a number of other factors including staff workload. A selected project will typically contain one or more of the following criteria:

- **Large non-residential developments in the Premier Gateway, Georgetown, and/or Acton Employment Areas;**
- **Major employment generators;**
- **Major office, commercial/retail use, mixed-use and/or tourism generators;**
- **Large monetary investments;**
- **Projects within the Town's identified key strategic sectors (i.e. advanced manufacturing, clean technology, food and beverage); and**
- **Projects facing very urgent timelines.**

Although many components of the program have already been implemented into the everyday workplans of Town staff, the Business Concierge program will officially launch in Q1 2021.



TOURISM

Tourism is a major component and established sector of Halton Hills' economy. 2020 presented a challenging year with COVID-19 significantly impacting the tourism sector. Events were cancelled, minimal outdoor activities were allowed and indoor capacity limits had many small businesses trying to navigate a new world of E-commerce and developing curbside options for customers.

In response to the negative effects of COVID-19 and the safety constraints placed on tourism businesses, the Town's efforts shifted to strengthening business resiliency and preparing for eventual recovery.

Key highlights of these efforts include:

- Identifying the key assets and confirming the value proposition of Halton Hills' tourism sector;
- Launching the new VisitHaltonHills.ca website;
- Creating an interactive online events calendar;
- Enhancing the local tourism business directory; and
- Collaborating with the Regional Tourism Organization (RTO3) to enhance the promotion of local tourism.

Visit HaltonHills

TOURISM BY THE NUMBERS

6,815



Total visits since the launch of VisitHaltonHills.ca in June 2020. The most popular pages were 'Trails and Conservation Areas' and 'Restaurants and Pubs'. The site had visitors from over 10 countries.

7,500
JOBS



Locally, approximately 7,500 jobs support the tourism industry, meaning that about 30% of jobs in Halton Hills relate to tourism. This includes the retail, accommodation and food services, and arts and culture industries.

500+ NEW
FOLLOWERS



A new tourism-specific Instagram account was launched in 2020 to better connect customers and local businesses during COVID-19. With regular posts directed at Halton region viewers, the account grew to over 500 followers in 4 months.

Visit HaltonHills

[Play & Explore](#)

[Sip & Savour](#)

[About Halton Hills](#)

[Plan Your Visit](#)



Culturally Connected

Halton Hills is a culturally vibrant community where culture is integrated with our economic, social and environmental lives.

[Learn More](#)

CULTURAL SERVICES

ARTS & CULTURE

Halton Hills is a culturally vibrant community that offers a wide range of opportunities for fulfillment through access to arts, culture and heritage.

The Town recognizes the important role that culture plays in building communities, improving quality of life and contributing to economic development by attracting investment and cultural tourism.

Cultural Services supports economic development and the growth of Halton Hills' creative capital through:

- **Cultural Programming**
- **Marketing & Promotion**
- **Professional Development (for the creative sector)**
- **Cultural Tourism Opportunities**

2020 saw the Town's Cultural Services team pivot and adapt its existing programming (which had typically been in-person) to the virtual space.

New programs were also launched to support local businesses and non-profit organizations by providing funding, education and professional development opportunities.



ARTS & CULTURE 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

- Launch of 'The Artist Next Door' commissioning program funded 7 community-engaged art projects.
- Adaptation of the Helson Gallery's popular school education program with the creation of 10 curriculum-based bilingual art lessons for Kindergarten to Grade 8.
- Helson Gallery offering in-person and virtual opportunities to experience various exhibitions including: 'The Collector's Eye: Selections from the Bruce Andrew's Collection', 'Creative Outlets: Art in the Time of Isolation', and 'Field Notes: Observations on Climate Change'.
- Support for local creatives through the professional development program 'Artrepreneur Halton Hills'.
- Installation of the 'After Nature' public art banner project by artist Ingrid Mayrofer. This series of banners featured 7 designs about climate change and at-risk species. A total of 159 banners were installed in five locations in Acton and Georgetown.



The Artist Next Door



artrepreneur | HALTON HILLS



"I am a teacher in Georgetown and we visited the Helson Gallery last year and really enjoyed our art lessons and Gallery tour. Thank you for providing these art lessons and access to past and present exhibitions on your website." - Local Teacher

"I cannot believe how much I have achieved in just a couple of weeks under the guidance of Artrepreneur. I not only learned a great deal, but found motivation at a time when motivation is very hard to come by." - Artrepreneur Participant

CULTURE DAYS

75

Activities

160

Artists

5,000+

Online Program Views



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The provision of affordable housing is foundational to preserving quality of life and attaining economic prosperity in any municipality. As Halton Hills continues to grow, affordable housing options are integral to attracting and retaining businesses, families and a high-quality workforce.

Recognizing the importance of facilitating housing that is affordable and accessible to all, the Town has included affordable housing directives in its Official Plan, Secondary Plans, Community Sustainability Strategy and Strategic Plan.

In order to create a vibrant community that is safe, appropriate and affordable for all, access to an adequate supply and range of housing choices is required for both current and future Halton Hills residents.

Throughout 2020, the Town advanced the following actions to support the provision of affordable housing:

- Increasing permissions, access and awareness for two-unit house creation;
- Building relationships with public, private and non-profit sector partners to identify and partner on affordable housing opportunities;
- Assessing and advancing Town-owned properties to facilitate the provision of additional affordable housing; and
- Incorporating affordable housing as a focus area in the update of the Town's Community Improvement Plan.



AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACTIONS UNDERWAY

‘What Does Affordable Housing Mean to You?’ Campaign

- The Town launched a multi-tiered communications plan to generate awareness of local housing challenges and to engage the community in meaningful discussions around affordable housing.

Affordable Housing Working Group

- The Town formed an Affordable Housing Working Group to develop and recommend actions that address the Town’s affordable housing needs. The Group collaborates in the research and development of practical, affordable, evidence-based, coordinated and effective actions to address the affordable housing needs of current and future residents of Halton Hills.

17 Guelph Street

- Envisioned as a mixed-income rental housing development in the heart of Georgetown, the Town received a \$40,000 CMHC Seed Contribution to undertake environmental and other ancillary work for the site. The funding provides cost efficiencies to the Town and allows for early stage pre-development work to commence in a timely manner. Town staff are currently undertaking pre-development work to facilitate a shovel-ready site



CONCLUSION

2020 brought forth unprecedented changes to both global and local economies: threatening public health, disrupting trade, hurting labour markets and affecting personal well-being.

Despite the uncertainty that COVID-19 caused, Halton Hills' Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division continued to provide a full suite of high-quality supports to the business community with the overarching goal to support existing businesses, attract new investment and expand local job opportunities.

The achievements highlighted in this Annual Report provide a solid foundation from which to pursue the next stage of economic development initiatives, programs and strategies in Halton Hills.

Moving forward, the Town will continue to purposefully shift its economic development efforts to be more strategic, coordinated and impactful, which will in turn foster a more prosperous economy and enhanced quality of life.

Economic Development staff will continue to assess the most current economic data available, and continue to take proactive, decisive and coordinated action to respond to COVID-19 and support the local business community, as Halton Hills' economic prosperity makes it possible for the Town to continue to deliver the services upon which residents and businesses rely.

Sincerely,

Damian Szybalski





TOWN OF HALTON HILLS
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
INNOVATION & CULTURE DIVISION

Contact:

1 Halton Hills Dr. Halton Hills ON

(905) 873-2600

EDO@HaltonHills.ca