

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, September 20, 2022

WARD(S): ALL

**TITLE: STAFF PARTICIPATION IN THE 2022 WEBSUMMIT
CONFERENCE**

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To help advance an international development program for the 2022-2026 Term of Council and elevate the local innovation, health innovation, and creative industries clusters, staff are seeking Council approval to participate in the 2022 WebSummit conference (November 1-4, 2022) held annually in Lisbon, Portugal.

Report Highlights

- The 2022 WebSummit conference presents an opportunity to build on the connections, learnings and awareness-building successes of Economic Development's participation in the 2022 Collision conference.
- Activities at WebSummit will focus on four areas: 1) trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) in the innovation economy; 2) promoting the Vaughan Healthcare Centre Precinct (VHCP) and health cluster development; 3) creative placemaking; 4) municipal innovation.
- The WebSummit's focus on health technology offers a unique opportunity to raise the profile of the VHCP as a world-class destination for health innovation with leading companies, consulates and global trade organizations.
- Lisbon is a world-class creative industries and innovation hub and gateway to Europe's economy. Staff will take the opportunity to lay the groundwork for future international development activities in the innovation and creative economies and in Europe.
- There is no new financial impact for staff to participate. Funding will be allocated from the Economic Development operating budget.

Recommendations

1. That Council authorize up to three City staff members, or designates, to participate in the 2022 WebSummit conference, including the City Manager, Director, Economic Development, and Senior Advisor, Strategic Economic Initiatives;
2. That any staff designate be determined by the City Manager, in consultation with the Director, Economic Development; and
3. That staff prepare a findings report for Committee of the Whole by Q1 2023 to report on the outcomes of conference participation.

Background

WebSummit is an annual technology conference that attracts over 70,000 attendees from 170+ countries to Lisbon, Portugal. To encourage Canadian participation, conference organizers provide tickets at no cost to municipal partners like Vaughan, York Region, Markham, and Toronto.

WebSummit will take place from November 1-4, 2022. Conference organizers provide several no-cost tickets to Canadian economic development organizations to promote their economies and develop trade relationships with other countries.

WebSummit attracts Fortune 500 companies transforming the technology industry, such as Google, Microsoft, IBM, Accenture, Amazon, BMW, and Samsung. They are joined by thousands of technology startups and venture capitalists. The conference also attracts government and public sector trade promotion organizations, accelerators, and consulates that attend to identify opportunities for cross-border trade and collaboration.

WebSummit is a sister event of the Collision Conference, hosted in Toronto. The City of Vaughan has participated in Collision since 2019, where Economic Development promoted Vaughan as a destination for technology and innovation. Participation in the WebSummit conference presents a significant opportunity to build on the momentum and success of Vaughan's engagement and activations at the Collision conference in June 2022.

In 2022, Economic Development leveraged Collision to raise the profile of the VHCP and Vaughan's emerging health technology and life science sectors. This effort culminated in an announcement at York Region's pavilion for the VHCP from Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua, Mackenzie Health President Altaf Stationwalla, York University President Rhonda Lenton, and ventureLAB COO Matt Skynner.

During the three-day conference, the Economic Development staff made nearly 300 individual connections among representatives from multi-national firms, high-growth companies, other local, national, and international governments, public sector organizations, and investment agencies. In addition, to foster opportunities for foreign direct investment, Economic Development met with international investment agencies, consulates and public sector stakeholders to deliver technical briefings on Vaughan's economy, including:

- Austrian Consulate General;
- Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Toronto;
- Consulate General of Greece in Toronto;
- Consulate General of Japan in Toronto;
- Illinois Department of Trade and Economic Opportunity;
- InvestHK;
- Invest Lithuania;
- Italian Trade Commissioner Service;
- Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO);
- KOTRA (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency);
- Startup Luxembourg and the Luxembourg-City Incubator;
- Switzerland Global Enterprise; and
- UK Department for International Trade.

The WebSummit conference is an opportunity to deepen relationships with international organizations and stakeholders that Economic Development staff engaged with at Collision and develop new connections.

The WebSummit will explore the future of healthcare and emerging trends in health technology as one of the main conference tracks. The focus on healthcare presents an opportunity to raise the profile of the VHCP among global audiences and to conduct trade and FDI activities with companies and investment organizations representing more than 170 countries.

Developing the VHCP into a world-class destination for health and health innovation is a major strategic priority for the City of Vaughan, and the WebSummit conference presents an opportunity to raise the precinct's profile with a global audience. The healthcare conference track will explore emerging trends in healthcare relevant to the VHCP with a focus on topics such as AI, big data, medical devices, behavioural and brain health, nutrition, and fitness.

The Council-approved VHCP Feasibility Study highlights the global significance of the precinct and the importance of developing international relationships with leading companies, research and educational institutions and healthcare organizations to drive innovation at the site. The 2019 Vaughan-Israel Business Mission focused on better understanding global best practices regarding health innovation and collaboration. It offered the opportunity to learn from trusted leaders from Israel's health ecosystem and to observe cutting-edge technologies first-hand. Since the 2019 mission to Israel, the City of Vaughan has deepened relationships with several regions in Israel and with the Sheba Medical Centre to advance cross-border trade and collaboration in health innovation.

There are opportunities to replicate this same international business development approach with other countries leading the frontier of health innovation.

Beyond the WebSummit conference, the city of Lisbon is a strategic economic gateway to the European, African and American continents, a thriving startup city and attractive destination for technology firms, a vibrant destination for arts and culture, and a global exemplar for novel approaches to municipal innovation.

Portugal's location as a European and Atlantic business hub offers privileged access to more than 500 million European consumers and other markets in South America, Africa and Asia. Portugal is also the nearest European country to Canada and the USA. Given Portugal's strategic location as a gateway to the European continent, it is a natural ally for trade and foreign direct investment activities.

Lisbon is also an attractive destination for innovative technology firms due to the very high quality of engineering talent at a competitive cost and an extremely high level of English language proficiency compared to other European countries such as Spain, France, and Italy.¹ Lisbon is home not only to offices of leading multinationals such as Google, Amazon and Mercedes Benz but also to many accelerators and co-working spaces that anchor Portugal's fast-growing innovation ecosystem and provide support to scaling tech firms.²

Beyond the technology and innovation sector, Lisbon is a vibrant destination for creative industries and cultural activity. Lisbon's cultural scene features key institutions like the [Mouraria Innovation Centre/Mouraria Creative Hub](#), an incubator that provides support

¹ <https://techcrunch.com/2021/01/07/lisbons-startup-scene-rises-as-portugal-gears-up-to-be-a-european-tech-tiger/>.

² <https://www.theportugalnews.com/news/2022-03-11/how-portugal-is-becoming-a-new-european-hub-for-tech-companies/65769>.

to creative industry projects and business ideas, the [Belém Cultural Centre](#), a complex of venues and spaces for arts and culture, and the [TimeOut Market](#), a disused industrial area and its surroundings repurposed into a culinary destination and high-end music venue. Lisbon is a compelling example of models and strategies for promoting cultural activity and catalyzing the growth of creative industries.

Finally, Lisbon is also a well-regarded leader in municipal innovation. The City of Lisbon itself is a catalyst for open and collaborative innovation by taking a leadership role in establishing projects like [Smart Open Lisboa](#), a City-led open innovation program for start-ups to pilot their solutions aimed at improving the lives of residents in areas such as mobility, housing, emergency response, economic recovery, green economy and circular economy. Lisbon has also been an early adopter of innovative approaches to public administration. In 2008, Lisbon became the first European capital to adopt a Participatory Budget (PB) process at a municipal scale to involve its residents in the deliberation and ranking of proposals to be included in a predetermined slice of the city council's budget.³

Previous Reports/Authority

[City of Vaughan Healthcare Centre Precinct Feasibility Study and Partnership – Committee of the Whole \(2\) Report – Wednesday, October 13, 2021](#)

[2019 Post-Israel Mission Report, Committee of the Whole \(2\), March 9, 2020](#)

[Inbound and Outbound Delegations Policy, Policy No. 02.C.02, May 14, 2019](#)

[Employee Reimbursement for Business Related Expenditures and Advances, Policy No. AD – 018](#)

[Vaughan Economic Development Strategy 2011-2021, *Building a Gateway to Tomorrow's Economy*](#)

Analysis and Options

Staff participation in the 2022 WebSummit conference would focus on activities in the following four areas:

³<https://journals.openedition.org/factsreports/3363#:~:text=Since%202008%2C%20Lisbon%20has%20been,of%20the%20city%20council's%20budget.>

1. Trade and Foreign Direct Investment

Staff will identify cross-border trade opportunities, particularly with gateway economies such as Portugal, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Austria, and others, to develop Vaughan's health technology, life sciences, auto technology and food manufacturing sectors. Engagement would include technical briefings to trade and investment organizations to raise the profile of Vaughan's economy, meetings with leading innovation organizations to identify opportunities for partnership and lead generation for investment in Vaughan.

2. VHCP and Health Cluster Development

Staff will leverage the WebSummit conference's focus on health technology to raise the profile of the VHCP as a world-class destination for healthcare, health innovation and health talent with a global business and government audience. Meetings with leading companies, international consulates and global trade organizations will also highlight the strength of Vaughan's emerging health technology and life sciences sectors. A key outcome will be identifying organizations that can help the VHCP grow into a world-class destination for healthcare innovation.

3. Creative Placemaking

Staff will coordinate visits with municipal staff and lead cultural organizations such as the Mouraria Creative Hub, Belém Cultural Centre and TimeOut Market to gain knowledge of best practices and novel approaches for creative placemaking and to facilitate the growth and development of creative industries and cultural amenities. This effort will guide the ongoing development of Vaughan's Council-endorsed hub-and-spoke model for a creative arts centre.

4. Municipal Innovation

Staff will coordinate meetings with the city of Lisbon staff to learn about municipal innovation policies, practices, and projects such as Smart Open Lisboa, participatory budgeting and municipal innovation challenges. Developing an understanding of best practices for municipal innovation will yield valuable lessons for improving the quality of life for residents in areas such as mobility, housing, emergency response, economic recovery, green economy, and the circular economy.

A major lesson from Economic Development's participation in the 2022 Collision conference was that global gateway economies should be a focal point of future international business development strategies. Participation in WebSummit offers an opportunity to explore this further and to gain insights that will inform future Economic Development activities and strategies.

The 2011-2021 Economic Development Strategy, *Building a Gateway to Tomorrow's Economy*, identified several international business development strategies for establishing Vaughan as a gateway to the broader GTHA corridor. Meetings with representatives of countries across Europe and Asia at the 2022 Collision conference highlighted the parallels between Vaughan as a gateway economy in North America and similar gateway economies abroad. Strengthening relationships with gateway destinations such as Austria, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, and Portugal presents a significant opportunity to help Vaughan-based companies access leading European economies.

Looking to the next Economic Development business plan, to be presented to Council in Q1 2023 and to include an international development plan, the City will leverage its position as a gateway economy to connect to its primary targets (Israel, Italy, China, the United States) through other gateway economies. Furthermore, all international business development activities will help to achieve specific objectives, including: 1) trade; 2) foreign direct investment; and 3) municipal learning to develop Vaughan as a centre of excellence for entrepreneurship, innovation and purpose-driven business. The outcomes of staff participation at the WebSummit conference will inform the development of the next Economic Development business plan for 2023 and a future international business development program focused on these three key activities.

Financial Impact

The budget for three City staff participants is approximately \$12,000. There is no new financial impact for staff to participate. Funding will be allocated from the Economic Development operating budget.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The City of Markham and the City of Toronto are also advancing plans to participate in WebSummit in November 2022.

York Region is Canada's second-largest hub for technology and innovation. In addition, Vaughan is the largest economy and employment centre in the region, accounting for 39 per cent of all jobs. Vaughan is the predominant leader in the regional economy. The City's 10-Year Economic Development Strategy also positions Vaughan as the global gateway between the GTA and an international, knowledge-based marketplace.

Conclusion

Based on the successful participation in the 2022 Collision conference and the strategic value of engagement with Portugal as a gateway economy, staff are recommending that Council approve participation in the 2022 WebSummit conference to undertake activities to advance trade and foreign direct investment, the VHCP, creative placemaking and municipal innovation. Participation in the WebSummit conference will also lay the groundwork for the next Economic Development business plan and future international business development programming. Staff will report back to Council regarding the outcomes and insights emerging from conference participation in Q1 2023.

For more information, please contact Raphael Costa, Director of Economic Development at Raphael.costa@vaughan.ca.

Attachment

1. Memo: 2022 Collision Conference: Post-Conference Wrap-up, June 27, 2022.

Prepared by

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Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Spensieri', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Nick Spensieri, City Manager