

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, May 14, 2024

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: SITE SELECTORS' GUILD CONFERENCE 2024 - REVIEW

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To attract future investment, Economic Development (EcDev) participated in the 2024 Site Selectors' Guild Conference, April 2-5, 2024, as part of the York Region staff delegation. The following outlines the learnings and investment attraction activities undertaken by staff.

Report Highlights

- Site location assistance remains one of the key services offered by Economic Development.
- The Site Selectors Guild Annual Conference brings together more than 70 Site Selectors Guild members and 600 attendees from economic development organizations from around the world.
- Led by York Region's Economic Development team, the Cities of Markham and Richmond Hill as well as the Town of Georgina participated in the conference. In addition, staff from Brampton, Simcoe County, Niagara Region, Sarnia-Lambton, Northumberland County, Woodstock, Perth County, Stratford, Ottawa, St. Thomas, and Invest Ontario were in attendance.
- Site selectors consider a variety of factors when supporting business location assistance. Staff were able to learn a variety of current state best practices in attracting attention from investors.
- Vaughan EcDev, in partnership with York Region Economic Strategy, directly marketed a variety of opportunities in Vaughan to site selectors.

Recommendations

1. THAT Council receive this report for information.

Background

To advance incoming investments, Vaughan Economic Development (EcDev) is participating in the annual Site Selectors' Guild Conference. This is a premier opportunity to engage leading site selection professionals. These professionals are responsible for supporting companies' development and investment efforts.

EcDev routinely works with this industry when fulfilling site selection inquiries. This conference allows us to highlight specific and timely office and industrial investment opportunities in Vaughan.

Site location assistance remains one of the key services offered by Economic Development.

In 2023 alone, staff handled a total of 27 site selection inquiries and provided aftercare support to prominent corporations such as Cardinal Health, FGF Brands, Hanon Systems, Microsoft and Rivian Automotive. These efforts led to substantial investments and the creation of employment opportunities, contributing significantly to the economic growth of Vaughan.

Participation in international conferences is an important opportunity to raise the profile of Vaughan's economy among global audiences and to generate trade opportunities and investment leads across Vaughan's key sectors.

Economic Development's participation in international trade and investment activities focuses on activities in three key areas:

1. Trade and Foreign Direct Investment
2. Established and Emerging Cluster Development (for talent and innovation)
3. Advancing the City of Vaughan through Best Practice Research

Economic Development has identified the 2024 Site Selectors Guild Annual Conference as a key opportunity to connect with the leading site selectors in the U.S. and stay up-to-date on the latest trends in site selection and corporate location decisions. Site selectors play a vital role in collaborating with corporations to design and execute optimal location strategies for business operations. Establishing meaningful relationships with these influential site selectors is important in positioning Vaughan as

a favourable location for new investments and opens avenues for collaboration on upcoming corporate location projects.

The Site Selectors Guild Annual Conference brings together more than 70 Site Selectors Guild members and 600 attendees from economic development organizations from around the world.

The Site Selectors Guild is the only association of the world's foremost professional site selection consultants. Site Selectors Guild members have helped hundreds of companies around the world with expansion or relocation decisions over the past decade. In fact, in the past three years alone, Guild members facilitated the announced creation of approximately 165,000 jobs and \$90 billion in announced capital investment. Guild members are located across North America, Europe and Asia and have worked with companies across nearly every industry, sector and function.

The cornerstone of the Annual Conference is knowledge sharing, an interactive exchange of ideas and networking between Guild members, economic developers and investment promotion professionals from around the world.

To be eligible to attend the Annual Conference, the participant must be a practicing professional from a local, regional, state or national economic development organization in the U.S. or abroad. Each registration will be vetted by the organizer for eligibility before attendance is confirmed.

Led by York Region's Economic Development team, the Cities of Markham and Richmond Hill as well as the Town of Georgina participated in the conference. In addition, staff from Brampton, Simcoe County, Niagara Region, Sarnia-Lambton, Northumberland County, Woodstock, Perth County, Stratford, Ottawa, St. Thomas, and Invest Ontario were in attendance.

York Region's Economic Development was the Gold Sponsor (valued at \$40,000) for the conference providing participating York Region municipalities with the following benefits:

- 1 complimentary conference ticket (valued at \$3,300)
- Additional visibility through a full-page advertisement in the printed program
- Recognition across program, pop-up banner, website and PowerPoint
- Guaranteed private dinner with up to 7 Site Selectors Guild Members, including an opportunity to deliver a brief presentation highlighting each community.

To share the opportunities in Vaughan, staff reached out to local developers and collected material on available sites.

Various development partners responded to staff's call. As such, the <https://vaughanbusiness.ca/tap-into-vaughan/> URL features premier and current opportunities in Vaughan.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Vaughan Economic Development Action Plan, 2023-27](#). Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report, April 10, 2024.

Analysis and Options

The Site Selectors' Guild Conference yielded two results. First, there are a series of lessons learned from interaction with site selection professionals that will inform future investment attraction activities. Second, staff directly marketed current land opportunities to the site selection professionals in attendance.

Site selectors consider a variety of factors when supporting business location assistance. Staff were able to learn a variety of current state best practices in attracting attention from investors.

The top lessons learned were:

- Canada has re-emerged as a destination due to talent, renewable energy, and bonusing from provincial and federal governments.
 - Canada aligns better culturally than the US does with Europe.
 - The GTA is more favourable from a cost perspective than many of the tier 2 metro areas in the US.
- Canada needs to market regionally rather than as a country.
 - That the GTA has a “confusing number of municipalities”. This leads to product blur and makes it difficult to differentiate community opportunities.
 - Site selectors strongly recommended better leveraging the Toronto brand.
- Macro economic and political issues are accelerating reshoring AND reducing the size of investment projects as companies diversify value chains.
 - The concept of an expanding and evolving definition of risk is changing how decisions are being made by investors. Investors want to avoid risk: predictability in development and cost is key.
 - Talent shortages are leading companies to consolidate and expand facilities rather than open additional ones.

- Investors weigh the ease of doing business in a particular market with cost. The higher the ease of doing business, the higher the cost. Some of the top determinants when selecting a site are:
 - The availability and cost of labour.
 - Infrastructure availability including electricity, water, roads, and internet connectivity.
 - Available immigration tools and supports.

Vaughan EcDev, in partnership with York Region Economic Strategy, directly marketed a variety of opportunities in Vaughan to site selectors.

Through the conference, staff promoted nine specific site opportunities for potential investors in office and industrial. In addition, the city's Vacant Employment Land Directory (VELD) and city-wide economic opportunities were highlighted.

For a complete list of promotional material, please visit: <https://vaughanbusiness.ca/tap-into-vaughan/>.

Financial Impact

There was no new financial impact to conference participation. The budget came from expected Economic Development expenses subsidized by York Region's foreign direct investment fund and CanExport grant funding.

Operational Impact

None.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

York Region leads all international economic development marketing on behalf of its nine lower-tier municipalities, including Vaughan. This includes representing the region with Toronto Global – the Toronto area's foreign direct investment and marketing agency. This approach is backed by feedback from site selectors who reminded staff that they assess metropolitan areas before looking at specific sites for investment.

Conclusion

To attract future investment, Economic Development (EcDev) participated in the 2024 Site Selectors' Guild Conference, April 2-5, 2024, as part of the York Region staff delegation.

The conference was a key opportunity to assess best practices in investment attraction and to directly market to the professionals that help companies choose where to invest.

For more information, please contact: Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development.

Attachments

1. Daily memos

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