



# memorandum

**DATE:** April 2, 2024

**TO:** Mayor and Members of Council  
cc. Senior Leadership Team Executive

**FROM:** Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development  
cc. Michael Genova, Chief, Communications and Economic Development  
cc. Lindsay Davidson, Acting Manager, Economic Development

**RE:** **Economic Development Participation in 2024 Site Selectors Guild Annual Conference**

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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.

## **Highlights**

- 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.
- The Site Selectors Guild Annual Conference will take place from April 3-5, 2024 in Nashville, Tennessee. York Region's Economic Development will be the Gold Sponsor (valued at \$40,000) for the conference providing added visibility to the participating member municipalities and dedicated private sessions with selected site selectors.
- The cities of Markham and Richmond Hill and the Town of Georgina are also participating. In addition, staff from Brampton, Simcoe County, Niagara Region, Sarnia-Lambton, Northumberland County, Woodstock, Perth County, Stratford, Ottawa, St. Thomas, and Invest Ontario are in attendance.
- EcDev collected site packages from local Vaughan Developers. All information is shared here: <https://vaughanbusiness.ca/tap-into-vaughan/>.
- The conference offers an opportunity to raise the profile of Vaughan as an ideal location for investment to influential site selectors in the U.S. and stay informed about the latest trends in site selection and corporate location decisions.

## **Background**

***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 are participating 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 are in attendance.***

York Region's Economic Development is serving as the Gold Sponsor (valued at \$40,000) for the conference providing participating member 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 best 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.

### **Day 1 Summary**

***Staff arrived and met with York Region municipal staff to coordinate conference activities.***

Highlights over the coming days include:

- A joint York Region pitch to leading Site Selectors.
- Meetings with the local Chamber of Commerce.
- Various learning sessions that will improve how Vaughan EcDev can attract site selection attention.
- Best practice learning from the local business development and local marketing organization.

### **Day 2 Look Ahead**

***Day 2 Highlights include:***

- Meeting with the Nashville Convention and Visitors Corporation
  - Purpose: best practices for the promotion of the intersection of business, culture, tourism and quality of life.
- York Region Gold Sponsorship Dinner
  - Host seven site selectors for networking and presentations on York Region's municipalities.

- Vaughan staff will be sharing the slide deck found at [www.vaughanbusiness.ca/tap-into-vaughan](http://www.vaughanbusiness.ca/tap-into-vaughan).
- This is both an opportunity to profile the city and learn from industry experts on best practices for facilitating investments.

For more information, please contact: Lindsay Davidson, Acting Manager, Economic Development at [Lindsay.davidson@vaughan.ca](mailto:Lindsay.davidson@vaughan.ca) or, Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development at [raphael.costa@vaughan.ca](mailto:raphael.costa@vaughan.ca).

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- Highlights from Day 2 include a meeting with the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation and an exclusive sponsorship dinner with 6 senior members of the Site Selectors Guild. This meeting was an opportunity to pitch specific investment ready sites in Vaughan AND gather feedback on the City's presentation.

## **Background**

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***Staff participated in a meeting with the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation (NCVC).***

The NCVC is Nashville's equivalent to the Tourism Vaughan Corporation. The NCVC shared the development and rollout of the *Music City* brand. This has made Nashville the centre of a Tennessee tourism cluster and is Nashville's second largest economic contributor.

The success of the Music City brand relied on the buy-in from the business community, inclusive of both multinational enterprises and local small businesses. They were encouraged to build music into their own branding and advertising. This did not include the provision of branding toolkits from the NCVC. Businesses were encouraged to be creative in adding music to their own advertising.

In addition, the NCVC identified the potential in the business meeting and convention market. However, and similar to Vaughan as identified in the Vaughan Destination Master Plan, they lacked a large enough conference centre to accommodate meaningful conventions. The NCVC supported a local business lobby that actively sought investment for a centre while the NCVC began to book future events to demonstrate the market feasibility. This conference centre

allowed the NCVV to exponentially grow the tourism and resulted in a 2.1 million-square-foot center. Music City Center features more than 375,000 square feet of exhibit space, 128,000 square feet of meeting space, two ballrooms, a business center, and a 2,500-seat theater.

Today, the NCVV drives brand development and marketing as well as event delivery for the City of Nashville.

***The York Region delegation presented to six senior site selectors. This was an exclusive opportunity afforded through York Region's sponsorship of the conference.***

Staff from the four participating municipalities and York Region gave short presentations to senior site selectors. Vaughan highlighted local assets along with current industrial and office site investment opportunities that can be found at <https://vaughanbusiness.ca/tap-into-vaughan/>.

Feedback from the site selectors included:

- That the GTA has a “confusing number of municipalities”. This leads to product blur and makes it difficult to differentiate community opportunities.
- Site selectors are likely to notice a municipality of more than 1M people. They are not likely to research municipalities smaller than that.
- The Region has an opportunity to develop and promote our key values that will help local municipalities be better noticed.
- Site selectors strongly recommended better leveraging the Toronto brand. However, they acknowledged challenges with Toronto Global.
- There is a need for a dedicated site selection concierge to help navigate both municipal and provincial/federal issues.
- 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.

Staff will workshop investment marketing improvements with York Region and our partner municipalities.

### **Day 3 Look Ahead**

#### ***Day 3 Highlights include:***

- Attending the first full day of programming at the Annual Conference
  - Purpose: Knowledge sharing, an interactive exchange of ideas and networking between Guild members and economic developers and investment promotion professionals from around the world.
  - Highlights will include additional networking opportunities with guild members, as well as attendance at various sessions such as *The Power of Second: Turning a “Near-Win” Into a Competitive Advantage* and *Investment Insomnia: FDI Issues Keeping Global Executives Up at Night*



- Meeting with the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
  - Purpose: Best practices related to promotion and business retention and expansion activities.
  - Staff will also explore trade development opportunities between our business communities.

For more information, please contact: Lindsay Davidson, Acting Manager, Economic Development at [Lindsay.davidson@vaughan.ca](mailto:Lindsay.davidson@vaughan.ca) or, Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development at [raphael.costa@vaughan.ca](mailto:raphael.costa@vaughan.ca).

**DATE:** April 4, 2024

**TO:** Mayor and Members of Council  
cc. Senior Leadership Team Executive

**FROM:** Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development  
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- The cities of Markham and Richmond Hill and the Town of Georgina are also participating. In addition, staff from Brampton, Simcoe County, Niagara Region, Sarnia-Lambton, Northumberland County, Woodstock, Perth County, Stratford, Ottawa, St. Thomas, and Invest Ontario are in attendance.
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### **Day 3 Summary**

***Staff participated in "table talk" sessions with individual site selectors to better understand the current trends in investment projects that they are working on.***

Conference 'table talk sessions' had site selection professionals rotate tables to network with economic developers and to answer questions about their current work. Key lessons from these sessions include:

- Shell buildings are important assets for vacant employment sites.
- Jurisdictions like Vaughan that target research and development or advanced manufacturing jobs need to lead with workforce and ecosystem information in marketing.
- Site selectors balance two areas of concern for clients: ease of doing business and the cost of site development. For investors who value the ease of doing business, their costs will be higher.
  - Vaughan can provide ease to investors. However, the cost of land, because of our proximity to various amenities, is high.
- Ontario and Quebec remain attractive to investors.
  - Free Trade agreements with both the US and Europe make Canada an appealing place from which to do business.

- Ontario and Quebec's availability of renewable energy make them attractive to European investors.
- Automation in manufacturing is leading to three things:
  - Higher demands for electricity.
  - Demands for a skilled workforce with less emphasis on inexpensive labour.
  - Increased upfront costs of investment.
- A transparent and laid out site development approvals process is a key motivator for investors.
- Investors are keen to establish facilities closer to their suppliers and customers. This 'de-risking' of the value chain is a trend that was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Canada and Ontario need to do more to be noticed by US companies.
- In Medtech investments, the costs of operating are an increasing challenge that is driving those companies to low-cost jurisdictions.
- US auto manufacturers are quietly but aggressively pursuing hydrogen technology to power vehicles. These may be a preferred option to EV in the future. This may be related to electric grid capacity.

***Conference breakout sessions provided staff with insight into current best practices in site selection.***

Scarcity in labour, sites, and electricity were highlighted in one breakout session. Key takeaways from this session included:

- Talent related barriers to investment include: lack of skills, restricted immigration, poor community/quality of life indicators, and the lack of creative HR strategies used in the community.
- Talent shortages are leading companies to consolidate and expand facilities rather than open additional ones.
- Quality of life and affordable housing are key considerations by investors.
- Site related considerations driving investment are: the availability of land and buildings; public-private development, focused marketing, and the availability of development funding support.
- Limited energy availability is driving investment via: advancing technology, the existence of regional collaboration, existing infrastructure, and planning for future investments.
- In investments that ask for high degrees of renewable energy, Ontario and Quebec are attractive jurisdictions.

A second breakout session discussed how to leverage a near-win in site selection. Lessons included:

- Key aspects to include in site pitches to increase success:
  - Data preparation and marketing, and ongoing communications with the client.
  - Property and utility readiness.
  - Stakeholder coordination and site visits.
  - Workforce information and future outlook, community challenges, and policy regime transparency.

- The office market is being driven grade A locations, sustainability, talent, and complete community planning.

***Staff Met with the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and discussed potential collaborations in cross-border trade promotion.***

The Nashville Chamber covers the greater Nashville Region comprising more than 52,000 businesses and 2M people. They are a full-service economic development agency.

In particular, the Nashville region has strong automotive, shipping, and building clusters. Staff will share opportunities with the Nashville Chamber for a visit to Vaughan centred on the Auto Parts Manufacturers' Association (APMA) automotive summit in Vaughan in June.

**Day 4 Look Ahead**

***Day 4 Highlights include:***

- Attending the second day of programming at the Annual Conference
  - Purpose: Knowledge sharing, an interactive exchange of ideas and networking between Guild members and economic developers and investment promotion professionals from around the world.
  - Highlights include sessions with site selectors curated by region, a summary of the state of the site selection profession, and conference wrap-up.

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#### **Day 4 Summary**

***Staff participated in breakout room sessions with panels of site selectors to better understand the current trends in investment projects that they are working on.***

Staff attended the international investment session. Key lessons from this session include:

- Macro economic and political issues are accelerating reshoring AND reducing the size of investment projects as companies diversify value chains.
- What do locations need to do to attract innovation and R&D investments?
  - Need graduate training (universities) to train students for the business environment.
  - University relationships are an emerging criterion for investors.
  - Development in research and development means 'market-oriented' development/commercialization.
  - Attraction agencies have to market the community within the context of the unique research and development taking place in the community. I.e; life sciences is too broad.
- 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.
  - Ie; we must break down clusters and metro areas and demonstrate the 'economic geography' of Canada.
- Canadian immigration programs help to attract companies who will often import their work force when investing.
- Case studies are key in marketing.
  - In how the labour force was imported and recruited.
  - In the value chain.
- A disadvantage of Canada is the lower number of available sites and the remoteness of many of the jurisdictions.
- A key contributor to quality of life is financial sustainability. Often, companies that import their workforce will try to invest in jurisdictions with an equal or lower cost of living.
  - Cost of living is a higher contributor to quality of life than it has been in the past.

***The 'State of the Profession' panel summarized current trends and future directions for site selection.***

The session summarized the annual site selectors report. Key takeaways from this session included:

- The core of the report is the management of the global poly-crisis.
  - **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.
- 2022, the lead factor for investment was talent. In 2024, the lead is stable infrastructure.
- State of real estate, sites and buildings:
  - Supply of sites has been declining for the past 10-15 years. Some site readiness programs are emerging to help mitigate this.
  - Supply is low because demand has been high.
  - Sites with low risk are attractive. Low risk comes from predictability in timing, costs, and site readiness including shell buildings.
- Office:
  - Half of guild members do not believe that office development will return to pre-pandemic levels.
- Responses to Requests for Information (RFI) are key to getting on a site selector's radar. Sites will be remembered by selectors for future projects.

**Day 4 was the final day of the conference.**

***Next Steps:***

- Staff will follow up with site selection professionals.
- Staff will workshop next steps with York Region colleagues to adopt lessons from the conference into future investment attraction efforts.
- York Region will engage Invest Ontario and Toronto Global to better understand how they filter RFIs from site selectors.

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