

# The Town of East Gwillimbury

10 Year Economic Development Strategy – Part I

November, 2011

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

East Gwillimbury is forecasted to grow to 88,000 people by 2031. There are a number of considerations for the Town in managing this growth, not the least of which is how it will leverage an expanding regional economy for its growing population while also creating high-value, knowledge-intensive jobs and activities within the Town itself. The Town has strategic planning frameworks in place to guide the trajectory of this growth. The Economic Development Strategy provides a necessary addition to these frameworks by addressing the challenge of achieving *balanced* growth, effectively mixing residential growth with new job-creating investments in a range of industrial, commercial and institutional sectors. As such, the approach to economic development for East Gwillimbury is central to achieving the goal of a 'complete community' that builds upon the Town's rural nature and community heritage, while moving forward to create a prosperous economy based on where Town is going to be.

Economic development for East Gwillimbury can be based on the notion of '*a new kind of rural*', which defines the Town's growth based on principles of rural stewardship, quality of place and collaboration and partnership. This idea is based on the notion that high-value business and jobs will follow where people want to live, and that the Town has a unique opportunity to differentiate itself from its regional neighbours and partners by focusing first on attracting those people and jobs.

Considering the current context and the rapid growth that the Town will be facing in the next 20 years, economic development for the Town has to be premised on strategic planning, asset management and stewardship of existing resources.

## Approach + Rationale

The approach employed in the economic development strategy has involved the following steps:

1. An environmental scan and literature review of available data, reports, studies, and economic development strategies considered relevant to the completion of this study.
2. An assessment of local and regional economic development trends.
3. The development of an economic profile that highlights key patterns of change in relation to a variety of socio economic indicators.
4. An analysis of target industry business attraction opportunities.
5. Stakeholder interviews with key business and community leaders, as well as municipal officials who are able to provide further insight into trends related to the Town's ongoing strategic planning efforts, and land use and policy framework, and how these issues may affect the Town's economic growth and development.



The resulting strategy enables staff to develop year-to-year work plans and provide clear direction for the Town's economic development efforts and identify the resources required to meet the growing needs of the community. Time spent in developing an economic development strategy will pay significant dividends to East Gwillimbury as it:

- **Outlines the steps to follow.** Economic development does not just happen. It requires the community to identify a number of intermediate steps to reach its final goals.
- **Promotes efficient use of scarce resources.** A significant amount of money, time, and people will be required for economic development efforts and these limited resources must not be wasted. The plan will provide rationale for resource allocation.
- **Improves coordination.** Many programs, activities, groups, and individuals will be involved in the development effort and it is important that they not overlap or conflict. The plan will serve as a vehicle for communicating development activities.
- **Builds consensus.** The public and the private sector must agree on the major issues involved. This will lead to support in implementing the plan.
- **Increases public awareness.** Without public support, economic development cannot happen. It is important that the public know how development occurs and how it affects the community.
- **Strengthens the community's competitive position.** A community with a strategy will not only be inherently more likely to succeed, it will appear more attractive to potential business or industry than a community without a plan.
- **Encourages forward-thinking.** The strategy will encourage community leaders to think about the future and to not overlook opportunities for development as they arise.

## Strategic Directions

Three key themes have emerged from the research and consultation process that taken together provides a strong framework for the creation of the Town's new economic development strategy. These themes are discussed below:

### Quality of Places + Spaces

Economic development practice that is premised on offering the cheapest land, the most incentives or the lowest development charges can constitute a 'race to the bottom', and serve to attract business that offer low-density, low value employment. Communities are increasingly realizing that their economic prosperity is tied to the knowledge and talent in their community, embodied in their *people*. And while people will follow jobs, good jobs will equally follow good people. As a result, forward-looking communities are looking to grow their economies by emphasizing and developing the conditions and amenities that will make them attractive to highly skilled, motivated and talented workers.

This approach to economic development requires that the Town of East Gwillimbury pursue efforts of creating and enhancing an environment that attracts talented people. This includes factoring in considerations of attractive village core downtowns and



gathering spaces, parks, cultural facilities and natural heritage, as well as the pedestrian experience. However, it also necessitates economic development thinking from the perspective of newcomers to the Town; ensuring developments have a mix of recreational, commercial, cultural and personal uses that have a wide-ranging appeal. Finally, it recognizes the need to effectively communicate the community's strengths and assets in the form of a strong local identity, transmitted throughout the Town and to potential new residents, visitors and businesses.

## **Partnerships + Collaboration**

As this strategy has made clear, economic development requires effort from other stakeholders. Anywhere one chooses to look, they will find examples of successful economic outcomes premised on cooperation and collaboration at multiple scales and with a wide range of partners. And indeed, for many communities, regional collaboration is now a necessity; between transportation, workforce flows and infrastructure, the regionalization of planning and economic growth, and the globalized markets of investors and companies, municipal boundaries are becoming increasingly irrelevant. The capacity to leverage the resource and expertise of local partners, neighbouring communities and higher-level governments is now a key determinant of economic success for municipalities large and small.

This reality directly informs the third goal of the Town's Economic Development Strategy. On one hand, this involves identifying and pursuing opportunities for the Town to leverage both high-value, high-potential assets by working with other jurisdictions; for example, undertaking efforts to attract health services businesses associated with Southlake Regional Health Centre, or working with the Region to attract a post-secondary educational institution. On the other, pursuing effective partnerships and collaboration with service providers can also assist the Town in providing services to help it transition into a unique, high-growth, knowledge-based economy.

## **Effective Rural Stewardship**

The march of urban growth and sprawl has imposed monumental changes and challenges on many suburban and exurban communities. While this growth is accompanied by new investment and development that creates new wealth and opportunity for many of these places, it too often has the effect of enveloping and diminishing both the rural nature of these communities, and the unique heritage and culture that defined their history and appeal. Furthermore, these once-small communities often lack the resources and foresight to manage economic growth in a way that maximizes their long-term health and wealth.

The Town of East Gwillimbury finds itself at a similar crossroads. Efforts geared to expanding the business base and sustaining the rural/ agricultural community is meant to ensure that the decisions that the Town makes with respect to its economic prosperity are premised on inclusive and sustainable planning principles. This involves ensuring that considerations of land use, investment attraction, natural heritage protection, and effective service delivery are integrated into the Town's economic development



mandate. Furthermore, it is premised on the Town taking a targeted and informed approach to its economic development programming, and not sacrificing these principles for short-term gain.

## Goals + Actions

Based on this framework and the vision of the community articulated in the Town's 2011 Strategic plan, the Town of East Gwillimbury's economic development is underpinned by three high level goals:

- 1. To foster and promote the Town's efforts to create a community that is attractive, liveable and sustainable**
- 2. To take a leadership role in advocating and supporting collaborative regional economic development as a way to advance local economic development priorities**
- 3. To support the expansion of business investment opportunities in the Town's urban and rural areas**

These goals also support the Town's overarching vision and desired outcomes of the economic development planning process and encourage prosperity and opportunity for the county and its residents.

The timing for the associated actions that serve to implement on this vision for economic development is categorized as short term (1-3 years), medium term (3-5 years) and long term (5-10 years).

Given the rapid growth that is expected in the Town in the coming years, it is essential that this Strategy be viewed as a starting point for the community. The actions contained in the strategy are by no means an exhaustive or comprehensive list of all the potential actions for the Town's economic development. New actions will emerge throughout the lifespan of the strategy. It will be critical for effective implementation to continually assess how these new actions contribute to overall success.

To achieve the vision set out by this plan requires that the community see the strategy as a series of inter-connected steps, each with a key role to play in shaping the future of the Town of East Gwillimbury.





# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 A 'New Kind of Rural'

East Gwillimbury is forecasted to grow from an estimated 24,000 people in 2011 to 88,000 people by 2031. There are a number of considerations for the Town in managing this growth, not the least of which is how it will leverage an expanding regional economy for its growing population while also creating high-value, knowledge-intensive jobs and activities within the Town itself.

The Town's Strategic Plan and Official Plan have been put in place to guide the trajectory of this growth. The Economic Development Strategy provides a necessary addition to this planning framework by addressing the challenge of achieving *balanced* growth, providing a roadmap for the Town to proactively shape an economy that effectively mixes residential growth with new job-creating investments in a range of industrial, commercial and institutional sectors. As such, the approach to economic development for East Gwillimbury is central to achieving the goal of a 'complete community' that builds upon the Town's rural nature and community heritage, while moving forward to create a prosperous economy based on where Town is going to be.

While many communities slated for high growth have adopted a 'new urbanism' model premised on mixed-use, medium-density communities to varying success, economic development for East Gwillimbury can be based on the notion of '*a new kind of rural*', which defines the Town's growth based on principles of rural stewardship and quality of place. This idea is based on the notion that high-value business and jobs will follow where people want to live, and that the Town has a unique opportunity to differentiate itself from its regional neighbours and partners by focusing first on attracting those people and jobs.

Indeed, considering the current context and the rapid growth that the Town will be facing in the next 20 years, economic development for the Town will have to be premised on strategic planning (in a broad sense), asset management and stewardship of existing resources. By acting strategically at this juncture, there is an opportunity to take a comprehensive and integrated approach to growth that will avoid the '*we wish we had done...*' question many larger municipalities are now faced with.



## 1.2 Approach + Methodology

It is the Town of East Gwillimbury's intent to develop a 10 year, comprehensive economic development strategy that will guide sustainable economic growth opportunities over the longer term and generate economic stimulus by way of attracting new industries and businesses to the community and enabling and supporting the growth of existing businesses.

A critical component to the development of an economic development strategy regardless of the size of a community is a solid understanding of a community's performance against a range of local and regional socio economic indicators combined with an analysis of current and emerging business and industrial investment trends and their related impact.

The discussion that follows provides an understanding of the issues and external forces that are shaping economic growth in York Region and by extension the Town of East Gwillimbury. Consideration is given to the current context for growth in the Town including the emerging land use policy framework and the infrastructure investment that is underway. The resulting strategy framework capitalizes on the Town's unique time and place in the evolution of the community and that of the region more generally.

The appendices to this report provide a more detailed understanding of the Town's recent economic performance and the opportunities to drive growth and investment in the community. As part of this effort the results of the Town's recent Cultural Asset Mapping initiative have also been reviewed to further inform the issues and opportunities facing the growth and development of the community.

The approach employed in the completion of this work has involved the following steps:

1. An environmental scan and literature review of available data, reports, studies, and economic development strategies considered relevant to the completion of this study.
2. An assessment of local and regional economic development trends.
3. The development of an economic profile that highlights key patterns of change in relation to a variety of socio economic indicators.
4. An analysis of target industry business attraction opportunities.
5. Stakeholder interviews with key business and community leaders, as well as municipal officials who are able to provide further insight into trends related to the Town's ongoing strategic planning efforts, and land use and policy framework, and how these issues may affect the Town's economic growth and development

The resulting strategy will enable staff to develop year-to-year workplans and provide clear direction for the Town's economic development efforts and identify the resources required to meet the growing needs of the community.



While this strategy has been prepared for the Town of East Gwillimbury, it recognizes the role and importance of the regional economic development efforts led by York Region and others. By necessity many of the opportunities that could transform the local economy will require the collaboration and support of external partners and commitment of senior levels of government.



## 2 Overview

### 2.1 External Forces Shaping Growth

The impact of regional and provincial economic trends is evident across York Region in the form of a large and growing economy, the presence of key provincial sectors such as business and financial services, information technology, biotechnology and manufacturing and a strong rate of growth in small business and entrepreneurs. The region also reflects the continued importance and resilience of the province's agricultural sector with the emergence of the York Region Farm Fresh Association and support for a growing equine industry.

But the Region and the Town face considerable challenges in managing sustainable growth in the future. The high rate of population and employment growth will inevitably impact the Town's built environment; in addition, as the population increases there will be increased demand for services and infrastructure. The competitive nature of business and investment attraction in the Greater Toronto Area coupled with the desire for 'high value' jobs also means that municipalities must communicate a strong value proposition that will resonate with the businesses they seek to attract and the workers that those businesses will look to hire. An important element of this effort will be a community's commitment to ensuring a high quality of place over the long term.

An economic development strategy for the Town of East Gwillimbury must reflect and effectively respond to shifts in the regional economy in order to ensure its sustainability over the longer term. While still a largely rural community, the Town has an opportunity to take a long view as to the type of urban community it wishes to become and the steps that are required to make that happen.

Based on an extensive background review of published reports coupled with the insight and input derived throughout the strategy development process, the following discussion highlights the key trends that are seen as having the most direct bearing on the Town.

#### 2.1.1 Sustainable Growth and Development

There is no doubt that East Gwillimbury is a Town comprised of unique character and heritage as evidenced through its villages and rural areas. However, the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* has designated the Town to grow to nearly 88,000 residents and over 34,000 jobs by 2031 – growth that brings many opportunities, but may also threaten the character and sustainability of the Town as it currently stands. As a case in point, a recent *Toronto Life* magazine article has noted that “the march of sprawl swallowed Port Credit and Oakville, and it will swallow East Gwillimbury, too.”<sup>1</sup> The article goes on to suggest that the ‘rural-yet-accessible’ appeal of the Town is already in danger of being lost to places further afield, such as Cobourg and

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<sup>1</sup> Preville, P. 2011. “Exodus to the Burbs.” *Toronto Life*, September 2011.



Creemore. So the question becomes; how does East Gwillimbury avoid a cookie-cutter fate and shape its growth in a way that ensures *sustainable* prosperity and the preservation of its rural heritage and character?

As a start, the Town's Official Plan of 2010 ensures that over 70% of the Town's land is classified as 'Protected Countryside', including lands in the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt, as well as land available for agricultural and rural recreational uses. These protections are important for preserving natural heritage and environmental health, both important considerations for the overall 'quality of place' in the Town. However, sustainability does not just mean environmental preservation; it also applies to the character of growth and economic decision-making processes that the Town engages in. Since it was first defined by the United Nations Brundtland Commission in 1987, sustainable development has been understood to guide the use of resources in a way that does not compromise the needs of future generations. Increasingly, these needs have been understood to include social, cultural and economic outcomes, as well as environmental ones.

The Town gives force to this complete approach to sustainability in much of its planning and policy framework. The Town's updated Strategic Plan (2011) and Official Plan (2010) both reinforce the importance of managed growth so as to respect the environment while providing a range of opportunities to enhance the social, cultural and economic life of the Town and its residents. These provisions will ensure that the decisions that East Gwillimbury makes with regards to its resources – including how it grows and deploys its human capital, builds on and develops valuable employment lands and manages its natural resources– will all be engaged in a meaningful way.

But how does an emphasis on sustainability enhance the *economic development* opportunities for the Town? What does a sustainable economy mean for the way that the Town utilizes the 30% of its land that is developable? It could in fact be said that prioritizing a mix of uses and sustainable growth practices would push potential investors to other 'anything goes' jurisdictions. However, the looming reality established by the *Places to Grow Act* indicates something much different. As both the Town and the Region continue to grow, development opportunities will become increasingly constrained – by access to land, water and other servicing, and talented workers. Providing clear and cohesive 'ground rules' for *sustainable* growth will not only ensure the Town can add nearly 30,000 jobs and over 60,000 people in the next 20 years without compromising the physical resources or local character of the Town. It will also put the Town at an advantage from a competitive standpoint, both in its attractiveness to the swelling tide of businesses incorporating sustainable practices into their own operations, and in providing clear expectations for potential investors and developers. The Town's 'Thinking Green Development Standards', which adopt 'triple bottom line' sustainability principles and include considerations of conservation, efficient site design and building construction practices, mixed



land use options and active transportation considerations, are an important foundation to this approach.<sup>2</sup> The Town's Community Energy Plan (2009) sets aggressive targets for energy conservation and provides the necessary tools to ensure that growth is sustainable and progressive from the perspective of energy use and consumption.

Ultimately, with an emphasis on community development, culture and recreation in the Official Plan, the Town has laid a strong foundation for ensuring that its impending growth is determined by the contribution it makes to a range of objectives, including but not limited to the amount that it will grow the tax base. As the demand for accessible and affordable land continues and growth begins in earnest, the Town has to give force to the standards already in place and maintain the principles established in its Official Plan. This will ensure that it stewards its assets in a way that allows for economic prosperity and high-value job creation while continuing to preserve and celebrate its rural roots and character.

### 2.1.2 The Impact of Entrepreneurship + SME's

While the Town's Official Plan development guidelines can set out a framework for the nature of the built and natural environment in the Town, there are few mechanisms that it can bring to bear on the specific types of businesses and industries that will fuel the Town's job growth. One view holds that the development charges and property taxes that are raised from new construction on the Town's strategic employment lands are of sole importance, and that the nature of the businesses that are housed in those facilities are secondary (if not irrelevant).

That being said, it is clear through both the desires of the community and the realities of the broader economy that high-value employment in knowledge-based industries will drive immense value and economic spinoffs. Increasingly, these high-value jobs – and the economic growth that accompanies them – are created by entrepreneurs and fast-growing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has noted that “entrepreneurship is important for economic growth, productivity, innovation and employment [and] is believed to offer ways to help to meet new economic, social and environmental challenges.”<sup>3</sup> Determining ways to provide support to small businesses, new companies and entrepreneurs can be the most efficient and effective means of driving economic growth.

The importance of these SMEs to local, provincial and national economies should not be in dispute. Industry Canada has conducted research showing that between 1993 and 2003, high-growth SMEs – often termed ‘gazelles’ – were responsible for

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<sup>2</sup> Town of East Gwillimbury. “Thinking Green! Development Standards: Draft for Discussion Purposes.” April 2011. Accessed at <[http://www.eastgwillimbury.ca/Town\\_Hall/Departments/Development\\_Services/Planning\\_Branch/Consolidated\\_Official\\_Plan\\_Review\\_and\\_Update/Background\\_Studies.htm#Urban](http://www.eastgwillimbury.ca/Town_Hall/Departments/Development_Services/Planning_Branch/Consolidated_Official_Plan_Review_and_Update/Background_Studies.htm#Urban)>

<sup>3</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). 2009. “The Importance of Entrepreneurship”. Accessed at <[www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/50/44069838.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/50/44069838.pdf)>



45% of jobs created in Canada despite accounting for only 4% of all businesses.<sup>4</sup> Small businesses that have fewer than 50 employees were responsible for 27% of Ontario's GDP in 2008. In addition, small businesses employed 48% of Canada's total labour force in the private sector. Over the entire period from 1999 to 2009, small firms accounted for 37 percent of all jobs created (on average) in the private sector. Of late, "medium-small" businesses between 20 and 99 employees have had a much greater impact on overall job growth.

These trends are of particular note for East Gwillimbury, and the Economic Development Strategy it is undertaking. As will be discussed in the following section, industry in East Gwillimbury and indeed York Region is dominated by SMEs. As of December 2010, nearly two-thirds of the Town's businesses employ 1-4 employees. Indeed, of the 579 businesses in East Gwillimbury that reported employees as of December 2010, 82% of them employed fewer than 10 people. It is also known that, throughout Canada, the industry with the greatest share of micro-enterprises (1-4 employees) is professional, scientific and technical services. This sector has a high proportion of knowledge or "creative class" workers, and has been known to pay higher wages on average than most other industries – precisely the kinds of high-value jobs the Town of East Gwillimbury desires.

The Town has a limited amount of land on which it needs to accommodate tens of thousands of new jobs and residents with much of it strategically located in proximity to a 400 series highway. To support the future prosperity of the Town however, it is essential that the needs of small and medium sized businesses take centre stage in the local economy, and factor strongly into the kind of development the Town allows on these valuable employment lands. It must focus on encouraging new entrepreneurs and SMEs to enter the community, while also enhancing business services and retention & expansion efforts to encourage new investment from companies and entrepreneurs already located in the Town.

### 2.1.3 Planning for Diversity

The rapid growth expected for East Gwillimbury is significant, nearly quadrupling the Town's current population base. Of more interest for the Town's planners and policy-makers should be the composition of that growth, which will substantially change the local resident base and labour market. By 2031, Statistics Canada estimates that roughly one in every three people in the labour force will be foreign-born, assuming recent immigration levels continue. In addition, between 1996 and 2006, "the proportion of people in the labour force belonging to a visible minority group rose from 10% to 15%" – a proportion that is likely to increase to 32% by 2031.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Parsley, C. & Halabisky, D. 2008. Profile of Growth Firms: A Summary of Industry Canada Research. Ottawa: Industry Canada.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. *The Daily*. August 17, 2011. <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/110817/dq110817b-eng.htm>>



In contrast to these broader trends, the immigrant population in East Gwillimbury was just over 14% in 2006. Nearly 30% of Ontario's population was foreign-born in 2006, which was proportionately more than double the Town's share. In 2006, only 3.4% of the Town's residents were of a visible minority group (3.4%), lows that appear astonishing compared to the province (22.8%), and perhaps even more so, the surrounding Region (37.2%).

These figures are not trivial, as the skilled, talented workers the Town is looking to attract and retain will increasingly be looking for a quality of life and place that may differ from what the Town currently considers its strengths to be. This is by no means a unique phenomenon. Recent research has pointed out the degree to which smaller Canadian cities and towns exhibit a 'culture of whiteness', which can create barriers to attracting and retaining talent.<sup>6</sup> This in turn can lead to the appearance of 'insular' communities that do not offer enriching, culturally diverse opportunities – either for employment, or social experiences.

The Town's proximity to the large culturally diverse 'magnet' of Toronto likely contributes to this phenomenon. However, York Region is extremely culturally diverse as well, despite its distance from the downtown core, and many of its other municipalities are creating thriving, vibrant cultural centres. A commitment to diversity can pay economic dividends by signalling an openness to new ideas and businesses, but that commitment must extend beyond new ethnic restaurants; it must be founded in real opportunities to participate and contribute to the cultural life and experience of the Town.

The Town must plan now for the increase in diversity that will characterize its future growth, create ways to foster meaningful cultural connections, and explore the economic opportunities that may arise. While a difficult challenge, many of the Town's regional partners have successfully managed similar demographic shifts in their population, developing community program that focuses on effective understanding and integration of newcomers from a range of backgrounds. Engaging with these partners is a necessary first step in planning for the profound cultural changes the Town now faces.

#### **2.1.4 A Regional Economic Development Model**

Finally, it must be noted that the creation and implementation of this Strategy will not be done in a vacuum. It is not possible for one municipality, region, province or country to make a decision regarding its economic fate that does not impact (or get impacted by) the decisions of its neighbours. While "innovate or die" is a common mantra of both corporations and communities seeking to get an edge in the global economy, municipalities today are better served under the principle of "cooperate or die". Indeed, the

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<sup>6</sup> Donald, B. et al. 2010. The Talent Struggle of the Small White City. Presentation at the ISRN Annual Conference, Toronto, 2010.





degree to which communities can work together and leverage their economies of scale – either through formal organizations or informal mechanisms – increasingly determines the degree of their success.

In an economy that is increasingly global, municipalities (especially those of the size of East Gwillimbury) take a back seat to ‘economic regions’ that can provide modern and efficient infrastructure, transportation connections, and large consumer and labour markets. No less an authority than the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has noted that regionalism is a ‘new paradigm’ in economic development policy, where objectives can be better met through collaborative, multi-level arrangements than through central government dictates or individual municipalities going it alone.<sup>7</sup> In the Greater Toronto Area alone, there have been increasing calls for more effective regional economic cooperation from big-city business organizations such as the Toronto Board of Trade, the Toronto Region Research Alliance and CivicAction (formerly the Toronto City Summit Alliance). These organizations and other regional bodies such as the Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance already provide collective economic development services from which East Gwillimbury benefits.

As a town of 24,000 people, East Gwillimbury currently has a limited asset base in terms of clusters of employment or industrial activity; the Cultural Mapping Project has similarly revealed limited concentrations of cultural activity aside from notable ‘flagship’ heritage sites such as Sharon Temple. By population, East Gwillimbury is the second-smallest municipality in York Region, second only to King Township.<sup>8</sup> Though the Town has many advantages inherent in its natural heritage, the availability of high quality employment lands and access to a 400 series highway, it is clear that competition with larger and better-resourced neighbours to the south will rarely be in its favour.

Furthermore, there are few areas where the Town has complete control over its own fate, and must rely on partnerships to advance its agenda. To name just a few, master planning for water and wastewater as well as other infrastructure is under the control of York Region; regional tourism marketing and administration is conducted by Regional Tourism Organization 6; labour force planning is undertaken by the Workforce Planning Board of York Region and Bradford West Gwillimbury; and the development of the arts and culture community is led by the York Region Arts Council.

As such, the Town needs to determine opportunities for regional collaboration and cooperation and be prepared to contribute to those efforts that show a high likelihood of return and reward. There are a number of regional assets in a state of growth or change that represent a potential opportunity or ‘fit’ for East Gwillimbury, including the Southlake Regional Health Centre and York University. In addition, many of the ‘high-priority’ or ‘high-value’ initiatives that are, or have been, in the Town’s crosshairs – such

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<sup>7</sup> Regional Development Policies in OECD Countries. OECD 2010.

<sup>8</sup> York Region Planning Services: Population and Employment Statistics. 2011. <http://www.york.ca/Departments/Planning+and+Development/Long+Range+Planning/PopStats.htm>



as the extension of servicing to employment lands, the extension of 400-series highways, the attraction of a post-secondary institution, or the expansion of public transportation including GO Transit – are wholly dependent on the support, advocacy and/or decisions of the regional and provincial governments. By forming a strong relationship with the *regional* economic development office that is better resourced, better positioned to market to national and international investors, and better able to negotiate on behalf of its municipal partners for economic development funding from upper levels of government, the Town itself will be in a better economic position as a result. This regional collaboration, when done as a *complement* to local economic development efforts, can direct new opportunities to the Town that would otherwise be unavailable.

## 2.2 Our Current State

Despite the challenges and issues that will impact economic growth in East Gwillimbury over the long term, the community is part of a larger economic region that is characterized as having one of the fastest growing and diverse economies in the country. This fact suggests that the Town has significant opportunities to direct the type of growth that will occur.

This section begins by establishing the economic performance of the Region, whose recent explosive growth and economic & cultural diversification provide an insightful window into the opportunities and challenges to come for East Gwillimbury. Having established this context, a brief discussion of the Town's economy ensues to provide insight into the key trends and opportunities it can take advantage of. This includes a review of its key economic development assets, such as its strategic employment lands. Finally, the current policy environment guiding the Town's decision-making and the implementation of this Strategy is discussed.

### 2.2.1 Regional Economic Performance

#### 2.2.1.1 Population + Employment Growth

In 2006, the Province of Ontario released its *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (the Growth Plan), which set out a vision and policies to better manage growth, to plan for complete communities and to protect the region's natural environment – all principles reinforced by the Town in its Strategic and Official Plans.

The Growth Plan assumes that population in York Region will increase from 760,000 in 2001 to 1.5 million by 2031. This Growth has begun in earnest, as the Region added an estimated 147,000 people between 2006 and 2011. While the Town of East Gwillimbury has also experienced population growth, current servicing capacity have left it lagging other larger regional centres. However, the Town projected to grow to 34,700 residents by 2016 and 88,000 residents by 2031. This growth will have significant implications for all aspects of municipal service delivery, management and economic development from which lessons can be learned from the rapid growth its neighbours are already experiencing.



Along with rapid growth, York Region's population is also becoming **more ethnically diverse**. For the period 2003-2004, York Region had the highest net gain of immigrants compared to any other Census Divisions in Canada<sup>9</sup>. Over the 10 year period between 1991 and 2001 over 94,900 of York Region's residents were immigrants to Canada. Yet this growth is not evenly dispersed in the Region; Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan continue to attract an ethnically diverse population while the number of immigrants in the northern parts of the region has declines significantly as a proportion of the total population. In 2006, East Gwillimbury's foreign-born population as a share of total population was only 14.4%, well below that of the Province. To the extent that the Town can promote and leverage the access to services and opportunities for immigrant and minority populations currently provided by York Region, it can develop a welcoming environment for newcomers and an 'open for business' attitude that could improve its competitive position in attracting future talent and business investment.

The Region is also characterized by a **young, well educated and highly skilled population** employed in a broad range of occupations, from professional, scientific and technical services, to information and cultural industries, to education services and finance and insurance. The quality of the workforce has been a contributing factor to the Region's success in attracting business investment and entrepreneurs and enhanced its economic diversity. Meanwhile, East Gwillimbury has had a challenge in retaining its youth. The Town's efforts to attract a post-secondary institution to the community is seen as a critical next step to enhancing the overall educational capacity and youth retention prospects within the Region, and can also serve to attract companies and investment that rely on having access to an educated and sustainable local workforce.

The Region's **employment base**, while still led by manufacturing, is shifting away from goods-producing industries towards a more service based economy. The Region's *Economic Strategy* places considerable emphasis on strengthening existing industry sectors and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, it has the capacity to support technological innovation and commercialization efforts as evidenced by partnerships such as *ventureLAB*, a regional innovation centre located in Markham. The Town has the opportunity to leverage these efforts, particularly as it relates to driving a higher level of entrepreneurship in the creative economies expanding its health and green economy industries.

In terms of York Region's **occupational composition**, the largest shares were in business, finance and administrative and sales and service occupations. Many of these occupations are high quality, value added positions. The Region has made a concerted effort to align workforce development efforts with the needs of existing and new businesses. The Town's occupational composition largely mirrors the Region's, confirming a need to collaborate with the Region for workforce development efforts.

### 2.2.1.2 Industry Trends

Based on the economic base analysis and a review of regional economic development publications, the Region has clear advantages in **information technology, biotechnology, automotive and business services** industries. In time East Gwillimbury

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.york.ca/Business/Economic+Profile/economic\\_profile\\_chapter3.htm#3\\_3](http://www.york.ca/Business/Economic+Profile/economic_profile_chapter3.htm#3_3)



should look to leverage these conditions to create opportunities for potential industrial growth and partnership development for the Town.

The **information technology industry** is strongly tied to other industries for which it can provide technological solutions. Though loosely defined, communities in south York Region (e.g. Richmond Hill, Markham and Newmarket) have identified this industry in their economic development strategies as a key growth industry and have investment expansion and attraction efforts to facilitate this growth. The research and education support available at the University of Toronto, York University and Seneca College will advance technological breakthroughs and train a future workforce for this knowledge-driven industry.

The **biotechnology industry** is largely comprised of pharmaceutical, medical devices, medical technologies and bioinformatics industries. Regional assets such as York University's Centre for Research in Mass Spectrometry, the Southlake Regional Health Sciences Centre and the multinational corporation IBM, located in Markham, along with ventureLAB will be key players in the expansion of future opportunities throughout the Region.

Although the **automotive industry** has felt considerable setbacks in terms of job losses over the previous decade, it remains an important export industry in Ontario. Magna International Inc, headquartered in Aurora, has grown to become one of the most influential automotive parts manufacturers in the world. Considerable public and private research and development investment has been poured into this industry and firms across the value chain – in sectors such as design and clean technology – have benefited from it. Economic opportunities abound for firms that can provide innovative solutions in these sectors.

Another key industry that is driving business growth in the Region is the **business services industry**. This industry is generally concerned with efficient and effective ways of containing business costs. It can include computer systems design, engineering services, management consulting and accounting services. One of the Canada's leading enterprise software companies, OpenText, is located in the Region. This single innovative firm has grown to become a global leader in this field. Moreover, there will be a continued demand for business services.

Overall, East Gwillimbury is in a position to benefit from the Region's growth in these four key industries. Understanding the trends in these industries provides valuable insight into the shape that future growth and investment in the Region and Town might take. As suggested in section 2.1, it can also indicate where the Town's priorities should lie with respect to land development, business development and partnerships, especially with regards to accommodating high-value employment uses for knowledge intensive industries along Highway 404 and in the existing settlement areas of Sharon, Mount Albert, Queensville and Holland Landing.

In addition to these four industries, it is clear that East Gwillimbury has strong foundations in the **agriculture** and **tourism** sectors. Regional performance in these two industries is also provided to give greater context to the Town's activities and opportunities.

Not surprisingly, the Region's **agricultural sector** is concentrated in the northern parts of the Region. On average farms in the Region are nearly 25 hectares smaller than the provincial average. The highest proportions of farms in the Region and the Town



are in horse and other equine production, hay farming, beef cattle ranching, and vegetable farming. One trend of note is the popularity of horse farming in York Region countryside communities such as East Gwillimbury and Caledon, where it has attracted significant investment from an affluent segment of the population. East Gwillimbury is fortunate to be the home of the Royal Canadian Riding Academy, which is a four-season equestrian facility and attracts investment and visitors to the area.

The urban growth of the Greater Toronto Area has also created a large consumer market for a diverse range of locally grown products and initiatives as well. The proximity to the Holland Marsh is a regional asset in this regard.

The state of the regional agriculture industry suggests opportunities for the Region and Town to expand and promote horse and other equine industries, and foster growth and investment in the agri-tourism market to serve the Greater Toronto Area consumer interest in buying locally grown produce. Further efforts are required to align with the Holland Marsh growers as well as potential agri-business entrepreneurs to strengthen agri-tourism in northern York Region.

In a related sense, York Region also has strong **tourism development** potential. By being located in Canada's largest consumer market, the Greater Toronto Area, the Region has access to six million people within a short drive or commute. The Region's *Long Term Tourism Destination Development Strategy* states that tourists are generally interested in the unique 'differences' of a region they visit in addition to relaxation and escape. Much of the visitor activity to York Region was for same day visits, which totalled over two million in 2008. Tourists are typically visiting from the City of Toronto and neighbouring regions. These findings indicate the importance of the domestic and more specifically the Greater Golden Horseshoe tourism market in sustaining this sector of the economy in York Region and East Gwillimbury.

Many of the tourists to the Region are attracted to locations in the southern parts of the Region such as Canada's Wonderland and Vaughan Mills Shopping Centre. York Region is also in a strong competitive position as a location for sports events, housing a large number of high quality recreational centres. The region's natural assets, cycling trails and passive outdoor recreation also represent an opportunity to drive a higher degree of eco-tourism. As suggested above, East Gwillimbury's equestrian assets could be used to direct additional tourism spending to the area. The horse industry contributes \$19.6 million to the Canadian economy and other industries throughout the value chain benefit such as agricultural producers and equine service providers (i.e. veterinarian services, horse therapy services, etc.).<sup>10</sup>

### **2.2.1.3 Business + Enterprise Trends**

The greatest concentration of businesses in York continues to be in its southern communities, specifically along the 400 series highways. While the Region has been successful in attracting many multinational corporations to the area such as State Farm, IBM, Motorola, and Honda, not all business growth is dependent on multinationals.

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<sup>10</sup> 2010 Canadian Horse Industry Profile Study, Equine Canada, completed by Strategic Equine Inc., p.103.



The Region's business growth has in fact been driven by innovative, small, entrepreneurial firms, as discussed in Section 2.1. In fact, small firms are the predominant enterprises in York Region with over 85% of firms in 2009 employing less than 20 people. In addition, between 2007 and 2010, the highest proportions of businesses in East Gwillimbury are in the construction and professional, scientific and technical services industries. This suggests that key growth opportunities for both the Region and the Town exist in small, dynamic industries – including green construction and knowledge-based services. Both the provincial policy environment led by Ontario's *Green Energy Act* and regional priorities as identified through the York Region *Sustainability Strategy* suggest that the Town could become a competitive location for green industries, as well as professional services.

In order to fully capitalize on the potential of small dynamic companies and entrepreneurs, it is essential for the Town to provide and market business services and leverage those provided by organizations like the York Small Business Enterprise Centre. This is particularly relevant in light of research that suggests that an overwhelming percentage of new investment is driven from companies already located in a community.

#### 2.2.1.4 Growing Creative Economy

The Region's growth of a high technology, service-oriented economy has relied heavily on the prevalence of skilled or 'creative' workers that live and work in the Region. There has been much discussion on ways to capture the emergence of a 'creative economy' in communities across Ontario and Canada. Much of the discussion around its importance to economic growth in Ontario was driven by a report commissioned by the Province of Ontario in 2009 entitled *Ontario in the Creative Age: Toward a New Economic Blueprint*. This report examined the province's workforce according to four broad classes' of work that attempt to describe the labour force in terms of what people do, rather than where they work. These classes are:

- **Creative class** – those workers that are 'paid to think' including scientists and technologists, artists and entertainers, managers and analysts;
- **Service class** - where work involves limited autonomy and is service-oriented, and includes (for example) clerks and food-service workers;
- **Working class** - consisting of people who use physical skills to do routine tasks, such as mechanics, tradespersons and machine operators, and;
- **Farming, fishing and forestry (or FFF)** - includes the remainder of the labour force still engaged in resource extraction-based industries.<sup>11</sup>

The notion of a 'creative class' refers to those people who employ a high level of analytical, social and reasoning skills in the conduct of their work. They have higher levels of education and higher wages than the rest of the workforce. This research

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<sup>11</sup> Martin, R and Florida, R. 2009. *Ontario in the Creative Age: Toward a New Economic Blueprint*, Martin Prosperity Institute.



demonstrates that *where* people choose to live is as important a decision to them as their job, personal finances and choice of spouse or partner. Creative people are highly mobile and able to make these kinds of choices on the basis of local factors that include cost of living, access to cultural amenities and entertainment options, and natural beauty. In this context, East Gwillimbury will need to provide distinctive places and promote its unique agricultural and natural heritage characteristics if it is to be successful in attracting creative class workers.

The Province of Ontario and Region of York's proportion of the creative class in 2006 were approximately 35% and 42% respectively. The Town's proportion of the creative class has risen by 0.5% (36.3% to 36.8%) from 2001 to 2006. However, at 38.0%, the service class had the highest proportion of occupations in the Town in 2006. These trends suggest that the creative and service classes are likely to comprise an increasing share of the East Gwillimbury labour force in the coming years, particularly in light of the industrial labour force trends showing growth in 'creative' industries such as professional services, and 'service' industries such as food services. The Town will need to be proactive in attracting creative class professionals that have the skills and expertise to staff knowledge-based industries.

## 2.2.2 Attributes of the Local Economy

While a full and complete analytical profile of the Town's economy is provided in Part II to this strategy, the following section identifies and reviews those attributes that are considered to be the highest economic development priorities for the Town over the next 10 years.

### 2.2.2.1 Employment Land Base

Employment land is important in the context of economic development primarily because of the role that it plays in accommodating a community's employment growth. The provision of transportation and servicing infrastructure to employment areas is undoubtedly one of the more significant levers available to shape future urban form. Effective development of employment land can also contribute to a better live-work environment in the Town, with fewer residents needing to commute to job opportunities outside the community, which is particularly relevant for East Gwillimbury. It can also provide a greater diversity in the land base, allowing flexibility in responding to economic change.

From a *regional* perspective, much of the inventory of employment land is privately owned, highly priced and typically in high demand as a result of its location along the Highway 404, 400 and 407 corridors. A combination of continued growth and demand for employment lands throughout York Region and limited affordable supply create a significant business attraction opportunity for the Town of East Gwillimbury, particularly its Highway 404-adjacent employment lands north of Green Lane. The importance of large, available, serviced and high quality employment land for the Town are a differentiating factor when compared to the availability of similarly located lands in Newmarket, Aurora or Whitchurch-Stouffville. The timely and thoughtful development of





these lands will have a lasting impact on the future economic prosperity and competitiveness of the community. Specifically, the servicing and development of these lands will directly affect the Town's ability to continue to attract or provide high quality jobs and the generation of wealth and investment over the longer term.

Giving greater context to this opportunity are an *Official Employment Lands Economic Review* conducted in 2006 by Watson and Associates, and an employment lands inventory completed for the Town in 2010 as part of its Official Plan process. The Watson and Associates study suggested that, forecasting beyond the 2031 *Places to Grow Act* model, the Town had 2,955 net developable acres that could support over 57,000 new jobs – well over the target established in the *Act*. What is more important from an economic development perspective is the location of these lands, and the kinds of uses needed to drive high-value job growth and investment.

To that end, the Town has a number of strategic industrial land and employment corridors approved within the Town's Official Plan. (Refer to the following figure). By and large, these lands remain vacant or underdeveloped and await future development. In the near term, the most critical employment lands are those that can support general and prestige employment, which include industrial uses as well as mixed commercial (office) and institutional uses that have the potential to support a range of high-value jobs. Employment corridors identified in the Official Plan study include including the Yonge Street and Green Lane corridors, Holland Landing and Mt. Albert, The Bales Drive Industrial Area, and the designated post-secondary lands at Queensville to be discussed below.

However, the most significant employment lands opportunity with regards to both location and size is the Highway 404 corridor. When the 404 extension is completed in 2012, these lands – currently designated for both prestige and general employment uses – will have immediate access to Highway 404, which makes them ideal for companies that rely on the movement of goods and services and/or the transit of commuting workers from other regional centres. There exists significant opportunity in these vacant lands to support the achievement of the Town's employment intensification targets under the *Places to Grow Act* while meeting broader regional demand for the expansion of advanced technology, innovative businesses, supportive business infrastructure and a highly skilled resident workforce.<sup>12</sup>

These lands currently remain unserviced, and are largely held by private landowners and developers. That being said, with over 950 net developable acres of both designated and whitebelt lands centred at the main transportation thoroughfare through the Town, these lands represent an opportunity that can not be left stagnant or unconsidered. The 2006 Watson and Associates study estimated that this corridor alone had the potential to support over 17,000 jobs – 55% of all the job growth forecasted for the Town over the next 20 years – and generate almost \$25 million annually when including potential local, regional and educational tax revenues. In concert with its Thinking Green Development Standards and other planning tools such as Community Improvement

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<sup>12</sup> *Vision 2026*, Region of York., <http://www.york.ca/Departments/Planning+and+Development/Long+Range+Planning/Vision+2026/g3.htm>.

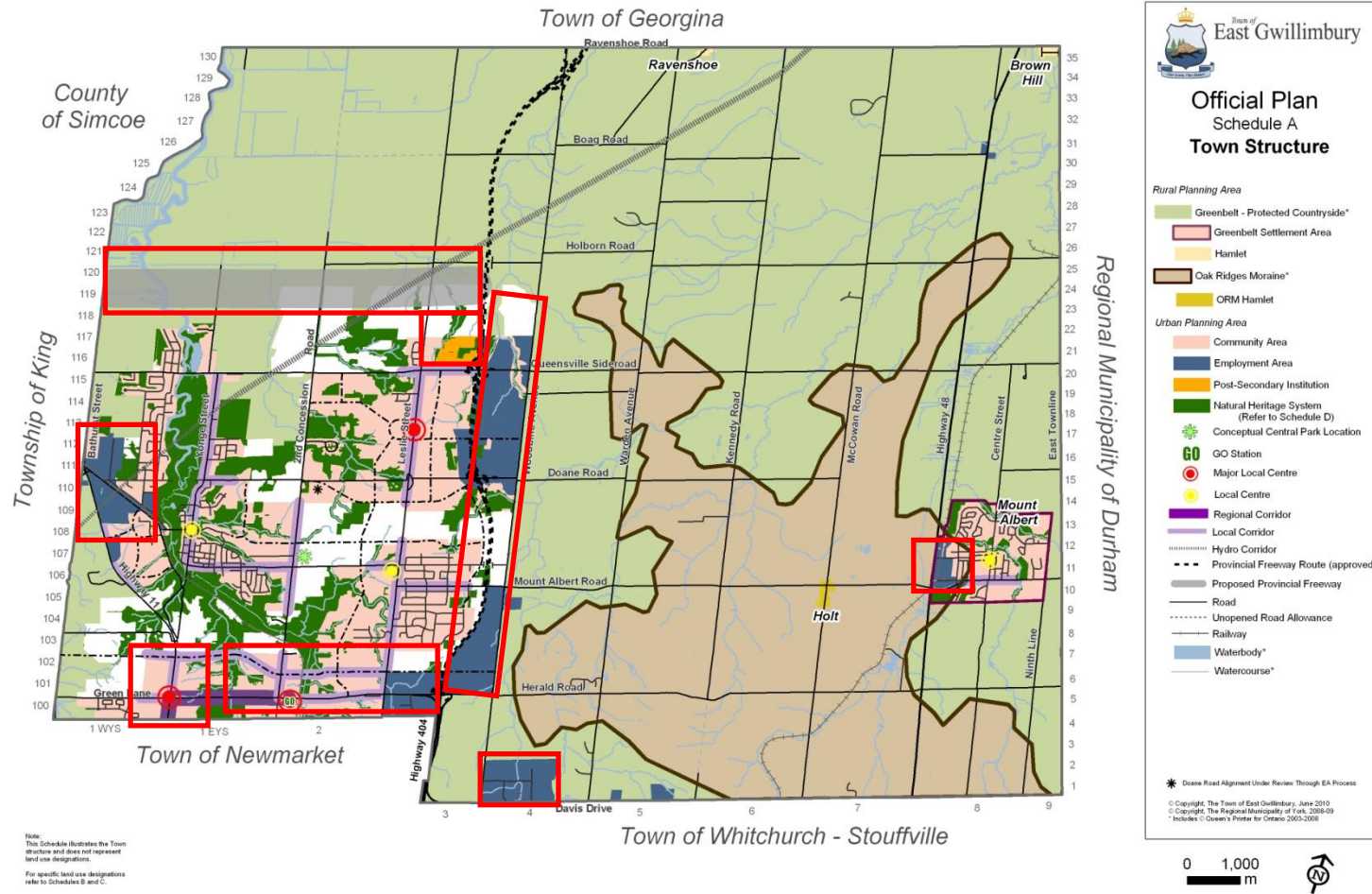




Plans (CIP), the Town should give consideration to influencing the growth of employment lands and establishing a prestige 'gateway' business park by employment linkage policy and/or potential CIP and associated incentives. The Town's ability to take the reins in respect of this central asset will facilitate the achievement of its other economic development priorities related to sustainable prosperity, achieving a balance of residential and non-residential investment, employment growth and the attraction of knowledge-intensive businesses and workers.



FIGURE 1 – EAST GWILLIMBURY EMPLOYMENT CORRIDORS AND AREAS



Note: Red coloured corridors and employment areas boundaries are approximate.

Source: Town of East Gwillimbury, Official Plan, Schedule A Town Structure, 2010.



### 2.2.2.2 Post-Secondary Institution Strategy

The Town of East Gwillimbury has identified the attraction of a post-secondary educational institution as a key strategic priority. This is reflected in their Official Plan, which identifies a 65 acre parcel of land on Queensville Sideroad, near the future Highway 404 expansion, and designated specifically for a post-secondary institution.

The value of such a development is unquestionable. A new post-secondary institution would provide an opportunity for residents of the Town, Region and Greater Toronto Area to pursue post-secondary studies in proximity to where they live instead of travelling to larger urban centres in Toronto, Hamilton or Waterloo. It would create a significant addition to the local tax base, support youth retention, and encourage spinoff employment and business development to proceed at a rapid pace. In addition, it has significant potential to facilitate the growth set out for the Town in the *Places to Grow Act*, and will significantly enhance the Town's reputation.

However, there are also a number of challenges the Town needs to consider before actively pursuing such a strategy. In one sense these are local challenges that may be within the Town's power to solve, and relate primarily to the location of the potential site. The current Queensville site of 65 acres, while perhaps large enough for a stand-alone facility or school building, is not large enough for an independent campus complete with ancillary services, housing and other requirements in line with similar campuses in Ontario. It has poor accessibility for public transportation, which would be critical in the absence of ample student housing built in the area. The exploration of other sites that are more accessible to public transit and a higher density of mixed uses and residential options needs to be considered in moving forward with this strategy.

This challenge speaks to larger concerns related to the need for a *clearly articulated business case* that addresses the reality of both provincial policy and institutional needs, which is currently absent from any discussions of a post-secondary attraction strategy. A best practice review for attracting a post-secondary institution attached in Part II of this report contains an assessment of recent provincial post-secondary education policy and other jurisdictions that have been successful in attracting an institution. The review makes certain points clear. First, successful jurisdictions need to bear the cost of significant resources – in terms of donated land, cash incentives, municipal planning and servicing extensions – to be considered as potential partnership locations with existing post-secondary institutions. Second, though the provincial government has committed to increasing post-secondary enrolment, recent policy announcements have also suggested that the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities will play a much more active role in deciding the size, location and disciplinary focus of new post-secondary facilities.

As a result of these requirements, to have any chance of success the Town must bring to bear a unified, well-resourced effort premised on an understanding of the provincial policy context, the priorities of institutions with the potential to expand, and the funding that may be required. This will necessitate forming partnerships both within the community and with York Region, who have greater scale and resources with which to advocate for this priority on behalf of the Town and the Region.



### 2.2.2.3 Transportation Infrastructure

As the Town's population and employment base continue to grow, effective transportation infrastructure will be critical in ensuring that its employment lands remain accessible to both resident workers and regional commuters, and that local quality of life is not overburdened by gridlock and congestion.

**Regional Public Transit:** Transit services in East Gwillimbury include three local York Region Transit routes, a VIVA rapid bus transit route along Green Lane, as well as GO rail and GO bus service. The Town has potential to further develop transit opportunities as population and employment in the community grows. Future population and employment growth will also create the need for additional transit service within East Gwillimbury especially as it relates to services between the village cores, the planned post-secondary institution and to employment areas.

**Highway Transportation:** The provincial highway transportation network expansion in York Region will enhance the movement of goods and services and enable the attraction of further business investment. York Region has actively lobbied the Province of Ontario for continued expansion of 400 series highways. Construction of the Highway 404 extension from Green Lane to Ravenshoe Road will be completed in December 2012. At an average annual daily traffic (AADT) volume of 24,400 vehicles at Green Lane and Highway 404, there is already a sufficient amount of traffic on this stretch of Highway 404.<sup>13</sup> Over the longer term horizon both Highways 404 and 400 may be linked north of Queensville Sideroad, which would make the community even more attractive as a location for residential growth and business investment.

### 2.2.2.4 Creative Industries + Occupations

As discussed above, the creative economy is premised on the idea that a strong quality of place is attractive to highly-skilled workers, which in turn attract high-value jobs and industries to a community. It is important in the context of this Strategy to understand the impact of the creative economy in the Town. Three important attributes for establishing a framework for assessing and analyzing the impact of the creative economy include:

- A focus on enterprises (the number of businesses rather than the size of its labour force);
- The number of innovative and culturally based enterprises (arts and culture as well as engineering firms);
- The number of enterprises engaged in direct creative activities (cottage industries as well as small business).<sup>14</sup>

The number of **creative businesses** in East Gwillimbury increased from 177 in December 2007 to 235 in December 2010 (32.8% growth over three years). The largest numbers of creative businesses were in the following industries:

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<sup>13</sup> 2007 Provincial Highways Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) Volumes, Ministry of Transportation, p.41

<sup>14</sup> ConsultEcon, Inc. *North Shore Creative Economy Market Analysis and Action Plan*, April 2008.



- Business consulting (69 businesses or 29.4% of the total)
- Web and software (54 businesses or 23.0% of the total)
- Engineering (43 businesses or 18.3% of the total).

The highest rate of business growth among the top three creative business types was in engineering. Although these industries may be small, there are growing, local knowledge based industries in East Gwillimbury.

On a related note, **creative occupations** are also a useful way of analyzing the economy. These occupations cut across industry sector lines in a way that can impact both traditional (i.e. manufacturing) and emerging industries and the degree to which these occupations translate to a well paid and highly skilled labour force. The skills needed for creative occupations are more heavily weighted towards analytical and social intelligence skills, which play a significant role in the knowledge driven economy.

People engaged in creative occupations currently comprise nearly 5,000 workers in East Gwillimbury, an increase of 13.7% since 2001. In addition, the largest proportion of these workers are in management occupations (42.0%). In terms of percentage growth, professional occupations in health, business and finance experienced the largest percentage increases of approximately 75% between 2001 and 2011. Earning higher wages and possessing specialized skills and innovative capacities, these are precisely the kinds of high-value workers the Town should be looking to house. However, as the labour force assessment in Part I of this strategy indicates, only 12.4% of the Town's commuting labour force actually worked in the Town as of 2006; as such, though its number of creative workers may be growing, the Town needs to do more to ensure those workers have jobs within innovative businesses located *in the community* that they can work at. The Town should better leverage this strong, talented and growing labour force in its efforts to attract business.

## 2.2.3 Current Policy Environment

In developing the economic development strategy for the Town of East Gwillimbury, consideration must also be given to the supportive policy frameworks from the Town as they provide a direct bearing on the implementation of the strategy and the overall development of the Town in the coming years. There has been considerable master planning already underway in the Town in part because of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe under the *Places to Grow Act*. These documents are summarized in Part II of this report, but specific attention was given to the following plans to ensure effective alignment between East Gwillimbury's framework for growth and the direction provided in the economic development strategy.

### 2.2.3.1 Strategic Plan

The Town of East Gwillimbury recently released a new Strategic Plan, approved by Council in October 2011, and meant to guide the Town's strategic and projects activities through 2014. The Plan reinforces a Community Vision identified in its 2005 Strategic



Plan, emphasizing pride in the Town's values, culture and mix of residential, employment, recreational, agricultural and natural environmental areas. The role of the Town to support the vision is to provide quality cost-effective services and to lead the community in the planning and delivery of a sustainable future. Five strategic pillars are identified to guide the Town's business and budget planning processes. These pillars are:

- Provide programs and services for a safe, accessible and liveable community
- Manage growth for a community that is environmentally responsible and provides healthy places to live, work, play and learn
- Protect, restore and enhance the Town's natural resources while working for a cleaner environment
- Maintain and build on the Town's investment in infrastructure including roads, sidewalks, facilities, parks, water and sewer systems and information technology and
- Continue to enhance a transparent and accountable municipal government focused on excellence.

Both separately and together, these pillars provide support to a more collaborative and proactive approach to economic development in the Review Process for the Plan. On the whole, the Plan identifies opportunities to strengthen environmental sustainability, cultural heritage and service delivery in ways that will reinforce the community's vitality and economic prosperity. In particular, actionable initiatives identified under the 'Managing Growth' pillar directly support an enhanced economic development approach in the Town, premised on the implementation of Official Plan growth and development guidelines that ensure business development and job creation form an integral part of the Town's ongoing growth.

### **2.2.3.2 Official Plan**

The Town of East Gwillimbury Official Plan (OP) was adopted in June of 2010; its provisions are yet to be put into effect, though the recent Strategic Plan and ongoing Secondary Plan development provide for its enactment in the coming year. The OP provides direction and a policy framework for managing growth and land use decisions over the planning period to 2031. The policies of the Plan set a progressive vision for East Gwillimbury *to develop as a complete, healthy and sustainable community that will provide opportunities for residents at all life stages to live, work, play and learn*. The following provisions of the Official Plan are seen to have the greatest relevance to the economic development strategy in terms of employment growth and enhancing quality of place throughout the Town.

**Employment land policies:** The *Town of East Gwillimbury Official Plan* policies require the development of employment and non-residential lands concurrent with residential growth in order to provide local employment opportunities for residents. To ensure that employment targets can be met in a way that ensures sustainable economic growth, the OP seeks to achieve balanced growth by pursuing a ratio of one job for every two new residents in the Town.





Going further, the OP states that prior to the release of any residential Subdivision Plan for registration or prior to entering into a site plan control agreement for medium and high density residential development, the landowner/developer must construct or have under construction 56 square metres (600 square feet) of employment or commercial floor space within the Town for every residential dwelling unit that is proposed as part of the development application. The 56 square metres (600 square feet) is approximately equal to the amount of space required for one employee.<sup>15</sup> The *GTA Mayor's Countryside Alliance Economic Analysis* report states that the key to generating employment land and office assessment is to make available quantities of serviced land at locations that are well-served by freeways and other strategic transportation services. The policy of concurrent growth will help the Town service the employment areas along the Highway 404 extension.

**Design guidelines:** The Official Plan includes urban design policies for institutional, commercial and industrial development. In particular, the OP provides general guidance for built form, where it states that buildings within Prestige Employment areas should be designed to establish a distinct, attractive, prestigious business image, characterized by a high quality of architectural design.<sup>16</sup> In addition, these buildings shall exhibit a high level of exterior design through the character, scale, appearance and design features of buildings and their sustainable design shall contribute to achieving the employment land policies. The general guidance for built form for General Employment areas is very similar to the guidance for Prestige Employment areas. The Town's objectives for built form can be advanced and developed to integrate sustainability and heritage preservation themes in the planning policies.

**Community improvement Plan policies:** Many communities throughout Ontario have implemented Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) as a tool to help achieve planning objectives. The Official Plan refers to using a CIP as a tool for community sustainability. Specifically, it references these plans as a method to assist with the financing of energy upgrades and retrofits. In Section 8.14 of the Official Plan, the community improvement plan is explored as a tool that could be used to implement the policies. It is up to Council's discretion to designate community improvement project areas. In an attempt to preserve the heritage of East Gwillimbury's communities, CIPs could be designated for the village boundaries. Other communities have used this tool as a way to encourage green industries attraction and in the achievement of employment targets.

### 2.2.3.3 Cultural Mapping Project

The Town recently engaged Millier Dickinson Blais to complete a Cultural Mapping Project, which used a combination of data gathering techniques and community consultation to provide a rich profile of the cultural life of the Town. The Town's cultural assets and resources are important in understanding its quality of places but also in cultivating a 'pride of place' or identity on which the Town can represent and market itself. While there is a limited core of creative cultural industries present in the Town, there is a long

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<sup>15</sup> The figures used were referenced from the *Town of East Gwillimbury Future Employment Lands Economic Review*, October 2006, completed by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., p. 4-13.

<sup>16</sup> Town of East Gwillimbury Official Plan, June 2010, Section 3.3.3.3, p.29.



and rich history that is reflected in the stock of cultural heritage properties in the village areas (most notably Sharon Temple and Temperance Hall), as well as its natural environmental areas. The Project also revealed a burgeoning festival and performance scene in the Town which can be further supported and expanded. As the Town considers moving forward with a Cultural Plan, it should consider how it can better utilize the cultural resources, organizations and planning tools (such as Heritage Conservation District designations) at its disposal to enhance the cultural life and experience of the community.

#### **2.2.3.4 Community Parks, Recreation + Cultural Strategic Master Plan**

The Community Park, Recreation & Cultural Strategic Master Plan provides the Town with direction for developing municipal facilities pertaining to parks, recreation, arts and cultural and heritage entities through to 2018. The Plan identifies the need for major facilities namely two new ice rinks and an indoor aquatics facility. In addition, the Plan states that many needs of the arts and culture sector can be addressed by designing multi-purpose spaces within facilities.

One of the Town's greatest assets is its community park network. With over 174 hectares (430 acres) of parks across 35 locations, this creates an opportunity to connect existing greenspaces by way of trails and pathways. The trail network can potentially link East Gwillimbury's communities creating a unique rural experience for residents and visitors.

#### **2.2.3.5 Transportation Master Plan**

The main elements of the Transportation Master Plan are to ensure appropriate infrastructure and policies are in place to support additional transit service, cycling and pedestrian opportunities and other more efficient modes of travel. In addition, the Town needs to leverage provincial investments for transportation enhancements while improving the health and safety of area residents and expanding the Town's vibrant economy. The Master Plan provides recommendations for roadway, transit, pedestrian and cycling network improvements. These improvements are needed to ensure a balanced, more sustainable system encompassing all modes of transportation (e.g. bus, automobile, train, bicycle). Many of the roadway improvements are intended to provide better access to employment land areas and Highway 404. The authors of the Master Plan recognize that transit service is restricted to three local York Region Transit routes, a VIVA bus rapid transit route on Green Lane, and GO rail and bus service, and the future population and employment growth in the Town will necessitate the need for additional local and regional transit services. In addition, the Plan addresses pedestrian and cycling improvements for the Town's sidewalks, multi-use trails, off-road trails and bike routes. This Master Plan provides direction to integrate movement of people through the Town and region; however, transportation improvements can be further enhanced if each of the communities is given special consideration for preserving the rural character of the main streets.

All of these external forces shaping population and employment growth in communities across Ontario mixed with the Region of York's economic influence over East Gwillimbury and the Town's economic and policy environment have helped inform the strategy development process.





## 3 SWOT Assessment

An important component in the advancement of any economic development strategy is the opinions and thoughts of both business and community leaders present within the Town. They can provide an excellent source of up-to-date information or perceptions, as it relates to an area's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats that may be confronting the business community or broader region in its efforts to attract and retain business investment.

In this context a SWOT Assessment (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) was undertaken to examine the Town of East Gwillimbury's ability to support the attraction, retention and expansion of business and industrial investment, its capacity to deliver on economic development activities and the overall direction of the strategy and the sustainability of the community over the longer term. Input to the SWOT includes comments received during the stakeholder interview process, focus group sessions.

### 3.1.1 Strengths

It is essential that economic development strategy builds off and capitalizes on the unique elements and strengths of a local community in a way that will lead to economic growth and critical mass of business and investment activity in the future. The following strengths are some of the key elements for which East Gwillimbury can support a strong local economy.

**A Large Supply of Employment Land:** The Town of East Gwillimbury's *Future Employment Lands Economic Review* provided the Town with growth expectations for the employment areas within the Town and identified five strategic economic corridors. Collectively, these employment areas will yield tens of thousands of jobs.

**Accessible Transportation Network:** East Gwillimbury has immediate access to the Highway 404, which is part of the province's 400 series highways. The Highway 404 extension from Green Lane to Ravenshoe Road will improve the town's accessibility to other regions of the Greater Toronto Area for businesses that rely on transportation routes for the movement of goods and services.

**Green Space, Parks and Recreational Areas:** The Province's planning frameworks ensure that natural assets such as the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt remain protected. These green spaces, parks and recreational areas are a significant draw for many residents to the area and will be critical for maintaining a high quality of life experience for residents in the future. Many respondents during the consultation process stated that the Town should identify ways to preserve its green spaces and historic villages and leverage them for creating new business opportunities in areas such as cultural and agri-tourism.

**Proximity to High Quality Healthcare Services:** East Gwillimbury's neighbouring city, Newmarket, has a very progressive health care centre, Southlake Regional Healthcare Centre, that has expanded its services and capacity for new patients. In addition, the



Town's progressive intentions for the area surrounding the health centre will make Newmarket a destination for health care services in York Region and south Simcoe County.

**Strong Regional Economy:** The Region has clear advantages in information technology, biotechnology, automotive and business services industries. In time the East Gwillimbury should look to leverage these conditions to create opportunities for potential industrial growth and partnership development for the Town.

### 3.1.2 Weaknesses

While the previous sub-section outlined the strengths for which to support a strong local economy, these strengths do not necessarily ensure that East Gwillimbury is ready or able to capitalize on these opportunities. The following sets out some of the weaknesses that may be constraining East Gwillimbury.

**Small Employment Base:** The business patterns data revealed that there were only approximately 600 firms in the town with employees with the majority of firms employing less than five employees. The number of firms decreases significantly as the firm size increases, which suggests that Town is not well located to attract large business operations.

**Lack of Public Transit Options:** For residents to travel within the town they are limited to three York Region Transit bus routes. The lack of public transit options encourages a continued dependency on the automobile.

**Limited Broadband Connectivity:** Pockets of areas remain with limited/ poor broadband connectivity. Many businesses depend on broadband access for purchasing from suppliers to interacting with clients. An East Gwillimbury location may become a less attractive location compared to a community that can provide broadband connectivity services.

**Large Number of Residents Work in Other Cities:** As the labour flow and community flow analysis revealed, there are a large number of residents who work in other cities, specifically Newmarket and Toronto. Communities with large numbers of out-commuting residents generally have lower levels of support for community organizations, events and activities. This lack of support continues the cycle of having low audience bases and a low appeal for larger organizations, events and activities.

**Lack of Serviced Employment Land:** Although the Town has a large supply of unserviced employment land, there is a lack of serviced, shovel ready employment land for business investment over the short-term suggesting the Town may be losing out on investment opportunities.

**Limited Profile for Attracting New Business Investment:** Many stakeholders who participated in the process recognized that the Town has a limited profile for attracting new business investment. A more concerted and coordinated marketing effort is required to effectively convey the economic advantages of the Town (such as available land, low housing costs and competitive tax rates) and better communicate the services provided by the Town and Region to existing businesses and residents.



### 3.1.3 Opportunities

External factors can also play a significant role in influencing a local economy. These factors can include structural changes in the broader economy, shifts in demographic composition, technological improvements and changes in political policies. The following summaries are some of the opportunities influencing the economic development strategy.

**Leverage Access to a Skilled and Talented Labour Force:** the Town's proximity to the more developed areas of the region provides an opportunity to leverage the profile of a larger regional workforce as part of its business and investment attraction efforts.

**Create a Gateway to the Community:** The planned development of employment lands at the Green Lane and Hwy 404 intersection provides a unique opportunity to create a `gateway` business park for the Town and leverage this brand in its business investment attraction efforts.

**Advance the Recruitment of a Post-Secondary Institution:** The land use designation for a post-secondary institution provides the Town with a unique opportunity that many other communities across Ontario do not have. There is considerable local support for the attraction of a post-secondary institution to the Town that needs to be capitalized on as part of the Town's recruitment efforts.

**Support for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises:** Much of the growth of the regional economy can be attributed to small and medium sized enterprises many of which are highly innovative and entrepreneurial. The Town needs to build on this trend in marketing and attraction efforts rather than get distracted by the prospect of large scale industrial operations. Opportunities to cultivate a knowledge-based economy in the Town, focused on pursuing high-value businesses in sector niches such as green technologies, advanced health care and entrepreneurship should be pursued.

**Expedite Development Approvals Process:** Business and investment attraction is highly competitive and the Town must find ways to differentiate itself from other communities in and around the 404 corridor. An expedited approval process coupled with competitive development charge levels will help to create a favourable impression of the municipality in the eyes of investors.

**Identify Sector-Based Opportunities:** Much of the emphasis of this report has been focused on quality of place, collaboration and stewardship of the community over "picking sector winners". However, identifying the knowledge-based industries that show opportunity to drive high-value job growth and competitive advantage will help to focus the efforts and energy of the Town, so far as it can influence investors and decision-makers to choose East Gwillimbury.



**Leverage ‘Green Community’ Initiatives:** The Town has completed many progressive ‘green community’ initiatives such as the *Community Energy Plan* and the *Thinking Green! Sustainability Strategy*. All of these planning initiatives can be used to promote a greener community and foster growth in ‘clean’ industries.

### 3.1.4 Threats

The obvious measure of success for any economic development strategy will be how well a municipality capitalizes on its opportunities in an attempt to drive economic prosperity to their community. Equally important is how the municipality addresses or manages the internal and external threats that may keep it from achieving the community’s vision of a progressive, healthy and sustainable community. The following discussion lays out the key threats facing the Town of East Gwillimbury in effectively implementing an economic development strategy.

**Fiscal Austerity Measures at the Provincial and Federal Levels of Government:** The economic recession brought on fiscal austerity measures from the provincial and federal levels of government. Less available funding and more stringent funding criteria for municipal and community projects will make it more difficult for municipalities to receive funding in the future.

**Culturally Diverse Groups Remaining in Larger Urban Centres:** South York Region has attracted large numbers of ethnic and cultural groups. Many of these people may want to remain in the communities with the large mass of ethnicities and immigrants instead of locating in communities that do not have the social network or services to support this segment of the population.

**Provincial Regulations for Agricultural Operations:** Both decision makers at the Region of York and Province of Ontario need to understand the agricultural operating environment. The Town may need to evaluate the provincial regulations along with local policies that are impacting the sustainability of the agricultural base.

**Increased Traffic Congestion:** Traffic congestion is increasingly becoming an issue across the Greater Toronto Area. The additional cars on the roads and highways leads to longer commute times and longer delays in the movement of goods and services.



## 4 Strategy Development Process

A comprehensive 10-year Economic Development Strategy for the Town of East Gwillimbury has emerged from a multi-phase process premised on thorough research and analysis of the Town's economic opportunities, as well as extensive internal and external consultation.

The strategy development process began in March of 2011 with the compilation of three research summaries meant to inform the strategy and address key development needs and opportunities for the Town. These summaries focused on best practices in the use of employment lands real estate; balancing residential and non-residential development; and community efforts to attract a post-secondary institution. In concert with the development of these research summaries, a review of background documents was conducted to establish the policy and planning context in which the economic development strategy is created and implemented, which included a review of such documents as the Town Official Plan, Community Strategic Plan, and other key documents. The key findings of this review as they pertain to this Strategy are presented in Section 2.2.

This review was supplemented with a community profile of East Gwillimbury, which analyzed the demographic and socio-economic composition of the Town in the context of broader regional and provincial trends. (Refer to Part II). This profile explains past and current performance while also suggesting the potential impact of future population growth and change that will have a direct impact on the Town's economic development direction.

In support of this research and analysis, a comprehensive consultation and stakeholder engagement process was also conducted. This effort has included internal strategic planning and visioning discussions, as well as one-on-one interviews, with Town Council, senior staff, and key business representatives. The process was been overseen by an Economic Development Steering Committee comprised of key stakeholders from the Town, York Region, and other institutions. These sessions have been complemented by a broader public outreach effort, consisting of an online community survey and two focus group sessions held in May of this year designed to identify the Town's key opportunities for growth, as well as ideas for the implementation and execution of these opportunities.

The findings from these efforts – as well as other initiatives including the Cultural Mapping Project – have been used to formulate this 10-Year Economic Development Strategy. The Strategy provides key considerations for the Town as it pursues an aggressive and sustainable economic growth agenda, recommends key objectives and actions for the Town to pursue, and specific implementation considerations as well as measures to evaluate the Town's performance going forward.



## 4.1 Recommendations + Implementation

Time spent in developing an economic development strategy will pay significant dividends to a community because it will:

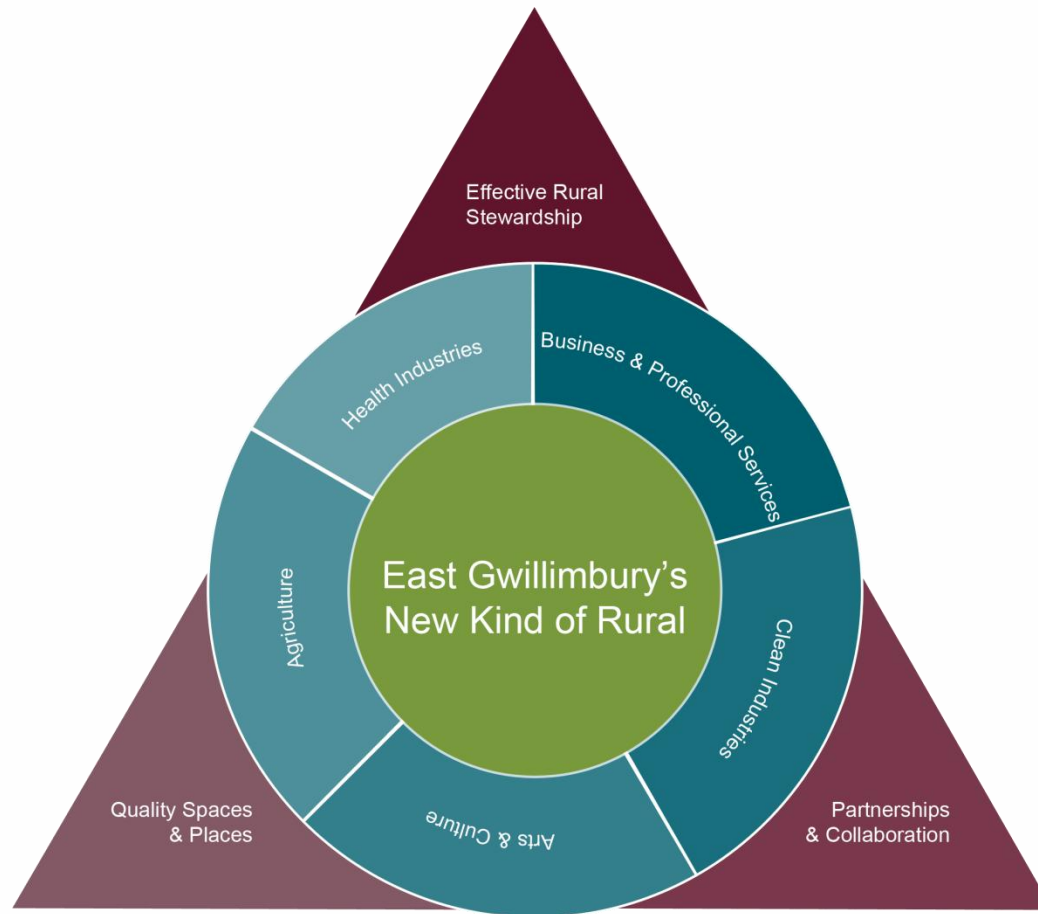
1. **Outline the steps to follow.** Economic development does not just happen. It requires the community to identify a number of intermediate steps to reach its final goals.
2. **Promote efficient use of scarce resources.** A significant amount of money, time, and people will be required for economic development efforts and these limited resources must not be wasted. The plan will provide rationale for resource allocation.
3. **Improve coordination.** Many programs, activities, groups, and individuals will be involved in the development effort and it is important that they not overlap or conflict. The plan will serve as a vehicle for communicating development activities.
4. **Build consensus.** The public and the private sector must agree on the major issues involved. This will lead to support in implementing the plan.
5. **Increase public awareness.** Without public support, economic development cannot happen. It is important that the public know how development occurs and how it affects the community.
6. **Strengthen the community's competitive position.** A community with a strategy will not only be inherently more likely to succeed, it will appear more attractive to potential business or industry than a community without a plan.
7. **Encourage forward-thinking.** The strategy will encourage community leaders to think about the future and to not overlook opportunities for development as they arise.

## 4.2 Strategic Directions

Three key themes emerged from the research and consultation process that taken together provides a strong framework for the creation of the Town's new economic development strategy. This framework is illustrated in the following figure. The 'new kind of the rural' is at the centre of the strategy. Surrounding the strategy's centre are the sectors that are anticipated to develop and drive economic development in East Gwillimbury. The strategic directions within each of the three points of the triangle are effective rural stewardship, quality spaces + places and partnerships + collaborations. Each of the strategic directions will have a set goal and number of actions, described in Section 4.4. The key strategic directions are discussed as follows.



FIGURE 2: 'TOWN OF EAST GWILLIMBURY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FRAMEWORK



### 4.2.1 Quality of Places + Spaces

Economic development practice that is premised on offering the cheapest land, the most incentives or the lowest development charges can constitute a 'race to the bottom', and serve to attract business that offer low-density, low value employment. Communities are increasingly realizing that their economic prosperity is tied to the knowledge and talent in their community,



embodied in their *people*. And while people will follow jobs, good jobs will equally follow good people. As a result, forward-looking communities are looking to grow their economies by emphasizing and developing the conditions and amenities that will make them attractive to highly skilled, motivated and talented workers.

This approach to economic development requires that the Town of East Gwillimbury pursue efforts of creating and enhancing an environment that attracts talented people. This includes factoring in considerations of attractive village core downtowns and gathering spaces, parks, cultural facilities and natural heritage, as well as the pedestrian experience. However, it also necessitates economic development thinking from the perspective of newcomers to the Town; ensuring developments have a mix of recreational, commercial and personal uses that have a wide-ranging appeal. Finally, it recognizes the need to effectively communicate the community's strengths and assets in the form of a strong local identity, transmitted throughout the Town and to potential new residents, visitors and businesses.

#### **4.2.2 Partnerships + Collaboration**

As this strategy has made clear, economic development requires effort from other stakeholders. Anywhere one chooses to look, they will find examples of successful economic outcomes premised on cooperation and collaboration at multiple scales and with a wide range of partners. And indeed, for many communities, regional collaboration is now a necessity; between transportation, workforce flows and infrastructure, the regionalization of planning and economic growth, and the globalized markets of investors and companies, municipal boundaries are becoming increasingly irrelevant. The capacity to leverage the resource and expertise of local partners, neighbouring communities and higher-level governments is now a key determinant of economic success for municipalities large and small.

This reality directly informs the third goal of the Town's Economic Development Strategy. On one hand, this involves identifying and pursuing opportunities for the Town to leverage both high-value, high-potential assets by working with other jurisdictions; for example, undertaking efforts to attract health services businesses associated with Southlake Regional Health Centre, or working with the Region to attract a post-secondary educational institution. On the other, pursuing effective partnerships and collaboration with service providers can also assist the Town in providing services to help it transition into a unique, high-growth, knowledge-based economy.

#### **4.2.3 Effective Rural Stewardship**

The march of urban growth and sprawl has imposed monumental changes and challenges on many suburban and exurban communities. While this growth is accompanied by new investment and development that creates new wealth and opportunity for





many of these places, it too often has the effect of enveloping and diminishing both the rural nature of these communities, and the unique heritage and culture that defined their history and appeal. Furthermore, these once-small communities often lack the resources and foresight to manage economic growth in a way that maximizes their long-term health and wealth.

The Town of East Gwillimbury finds itself at a similar crossroads. This effort of expanding the business base and sustaining the rural/ agricultural community is meant to ensure that the decisions that the Town makes with respect to its economic prosperity are premised on inclusive and sustainable planning principles. This involves ensuring that considerations of land use, investment attraction, natural heritage protection, and effective service delivery are integrated into the Town's economic development mandate. Furthermore, it is premised on the Town taking a targeted and informed approach to its economic development programming, and not sacrificing these principles for short-term gain.

## 4.3 Vision Statement

The Town of East Gwillimbury, through its Strategic Plan process, established an overriding community vision for the Town.

*“Our Town...proud of our strong community values, culture and healthy mix of residential, employment, recreational, agricultural and natural areas.*

*Our Future... working together to plan and retain a thriving community, today and tomorrow.”*

Building on this vision and the input received throughout the strategy development process, a number of goals have emerged that form the basis for the strategy.

## 4.4 Goals + Actions

The Town of East Gwillimbury Economic Development Strategy is underpinned by 3 high level goals, intended to anchor and qualify all strategic initiatives or ensuing actions on the part of the Town. These goals also support the Town's overarching vision and desired outcomes of the economic development planning process and encourage prosperity and opportunity for its residents.

The timing for the associated actions that serve to implement on this vision for economic development is categorized as short term (1-3 years), medium term (3-5 years) and long term (5-10 years). The actions have been further prioritized within these timelines.



It should be noted that that prioritization of these recommendations is intended to reflect a logical sequence of activities, with each action in the strategy contributing to a greater level of success as it relates to economic development and investment in the community. A more detailed implementation plan will be needed to address the budget, resources and more detailed timing of each action. The strategy also recognizes the current capacity of the municipality to actively engage in proactive economic development programming and activities.

To achieve the vision set out by this plan requires that the community see the strategy as a series of inter-connected steps, each with a key role to play in shaping the future of the Town of East Gwillimbury.

Given the rapid growth that is expected in the Town in the coming years, it is essential that this Strategy be viewed as a starting point for the community. The list of actions are prioritized based on community input and research at a point in time. It is by no means an exhaustive or comprehensive list of all the potential actions for the Town's economic development. New actions will emerge throughout the lifespan of the Strategy. It will be critical for effective implementation to continually assess how these new actions contribute to overall success and to continue to build additional capacity within the community and the municipality itself to implement an effective economic development agenda. The actions are listed in priority as well as a natural evolution of project sequencing.



#### 4.4.1 To foster and promote the Town`s efforts to create a community that is attractive, liveable and sustainable

Required Actions	Potential Partners	Timing
<p>1. Initiate the development and implementation of a powerful, bold and sophisticated new municipal website that can be quickly updated and that represents the image of the community that the Town is becoming. Include a new logo, slogan-motto development, internet strategy and audience focus. Include tactics for engaging current and future residents as well as business in the Town’s prospects for growth. Utilize results from the Cultural Mapping Project, including the solicitation of community stories, to craft an identity that highlights the ‘pride of place’ residents and business owners have in the Town. Full consideration should be given to conveying a new image and brand for the Town that is derived from the community vision that has emerge with the 2010 Official Plan, the Town’s Thinking Green Sustainability Strategy and the outcomes of the Economic Development Strategy.</p> <p>Other considerations for the site include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a local community profile</li> <li>• ongoing investment and improvements in the community</li> <li>• business profiles and local success stories</li> <li>• news and events including an interactive community calendar</li> <li>• maps and directions including general location maps, direction, and distance</li> <li>• contact information for the Economic Development Officer</li> </ul>	<p>Town of East Gwillimbury Departments</p>	<p>Short term</p>
<p>2. Initiate historic conservation district (HCD) studies for each of the Town’s village cores beginning with Sharon, as a way to recognize the built heritage of East Gwillimbury, and advance the larger community’s identity and sense of civic pride.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having completed the HCD studies prepare a Mainstreets Revitalization Plan that gives consideration to the evolving role of the town’s village cores as they transition from rural communities to</li> </ul>		<p>Short term to Medium term</p>



<p>urban neighbourhoods. Consider providing meaningful incentives to encourage appropriate forms of development in the village cores within the context of the Town’s community improvement policies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a funding strategy to finance capital works programs that include improvements to roads and streetscapes and the pedestrian environment.</li> </ul>		
<p>3. Prepare a coordinated plan for the development and promotion of the arts, culture, recreation and tourism industry in the Town that builds upon the findings of the recently-completed Cultural Mapping Project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include opportunities to host larger arts and culture festivals and events in collaboration with York Region or other York Region communities.</li> </ul>	Region of York	Short term to Medium term
<p>4. Effectively communicate the features and characteristics of East Gwillimbury that will appeal to residents and visitors including the town’s historic villages, organizations, cultural assets, festivals and events as way to support the development of diverse, vibrant and active community.</p>		Short term to Medium term
<p>5. As the Town of East Gwillimbury continues to grow, amenities such as banks, grocery stores and additional retail will be required to provide necessary services to the local community. A strategy for the targeted attraction of appropriate retail and tertiary business attraction should be undertaken in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce to ensure the right mix of retail experiences in the community.</p>	East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce	Medium term to Long term
<p>6. Ensure that the Town’s planning policy documents reflects and enable the growth of small business as part of its commitment to providing an adequate supply of employment land. In addition, economic development staff should work with landowners and the development community to promote and deliver more small scale office accommodation and innovative space options for small business.</p>	Local development community	Short term to Long term



<p>7. <b>Work with the development community, York Region, Nokiidaa Trail Association and the Town’s Trails Advisory Committee to develop an expanded network of walking and cycling trails that ultimately link the Town’s village cores or ‘neighbourhoods’ with the rural landscapes in the community.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Promote the town’s natural heritage and existing and planned network of trails as part of the community’s efforts to drive the attraction of skilled people, and knowledge-economy industries.</b></li> </ul>	<p>Region of York, Nokiidaa Trail Association, EG’s Trails Advisory Committee, local developers</p>	<p>Short term to Long term</p>
<p><b>Performance Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Number of visitors to the East Gwillimbury website and ‘click through’ rates across the website</b></li> <li>● <b>Number of arts and culture festivals and the estimated economic spin-off benefit in spending</b></li> <li>● <b>Number of walking trail kilometres</b></li> <li>● <b>Amount of heritage funding dollars available and allocated to finance capital projects in the village cores</b></li> <li>● <b>Number of new retail and tertiary businesses in East Gwillimbury’s villages and other commercial centres</b></li> <li>● <b>Floor space (sq.ft.) added to employment land areas</b></li> </ul>		



#### 4.4.2 To take a leadership role in advocating and supporting collaborative regional economic development as a way to advance local economic development priorities

Required Actions	Potential Partners	Timing
<p>1. Prepare a business case and partnership strategy to pursue the development of a post-secondary institution in East Gwillimbury that is of sufficient size and scope to benefit and service the larger regional economy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give consideration to designating an alternate location in the Town that provides more immediate access to a greater variety of transportation modes particularly provincial and regional transit.</li> <li>Conduct a review of the policies and procedures associated with post-secondary education expansion introduced by the provincial government to ensure opportunities are maximized.</li> <li>Directly involve representatives of various institutions in the development of a business case.</li> </ul>	<p>Region of York, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities</p>	<p>Short Term</p>
<p>2. Collaborate with the Region of York to ensure early sanitary and water servicing to employment lands.</p>	<p>Region of York</p>	<p>Short Term</p>
<p>3. Leverage the regional resources available to small business and start ups by more effectively promoting information pertaining to the delivery of training, business counselling, market research, preparing a business plan, marketing, event planning, and legal and financial assistance to small business operators and entrepreneurs in East Gwillimbury.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In partnership with York Region’s Small Business Enterprise Centre, Southlake CFDC, Workforce Planning Board of York Region and East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce host and more effectively promote business related events such as the Green Business Seminar as a way to attract and support the start-up and development of local businesses.</li> <li>Continue to support the YSBEC through active participation in its Municipal Advisory Group.</li> </ul>	<p>York Region Small Business Enterprise Centre, Southlake CFDC, Workforce Planning Board of York Region, East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p>Short term to Medium term</p>



<p>4. <b>Seek input from the GTA Agricultural Action Committee, the York Region Federation of Agriculture, the York Region Farm Fresh Association and the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust Alliance as to the opportunities for local food initiatives and near-urban agriculture operations in East Gwillimbury.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consider innovative solutions or partnerships for geared to beginning farmers, especially those with ethnic and culturally diverse backgrounds.</b></li> <li>• <b>Explore opportunities to partner with Ontario Farmland Trust, York Region, OMAFRA and Green Belt Foundation to expand the piloting of Ontario’s alternative land use system.</b></li> </ul>	<p>GTA Agricultural Action Committee, York Region Federation of Agriculture, York Region Farm Fresh Association, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust Alliance and other listed stakeholders</p>	<p>Short term to Medium term</p>
<p>5. <b>Initiate discussions with the OMAFRA representatives and York Region economic development staff regarding the factors impacting the growth of the equestrian industry in rural municipalities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consider the value chain of the equestrian industry and appropriate investment or promotion opportunities for East Gwillimbury.</b></li> </ul>	<p>OMAFRA, Region of York</p>	<p>Short term to Medium Term</p>
<p>6. <b>Develop linkages with the Southlake Regional Health Centre in an effort to drive growth and investment in the region’s Health Industries sector, particularly as it relates to the attraction of high value manufacturing of health products and related wholesale trade and supply operations.</b></p>	<p>Southlake Regional Health Centre, Region of York</p>	<p>Short term to Medium term</p>
<p>7. <b>Leverage the work of the York Region Local Immigration Partnership to promote awareness and acceptance of newcomers and foster partnerships and programs with community stakeholders (e.g. libraries, school boards, faith communities, community agencies and organizations).</b></p>	<p>York Region Local Immigration Partnership</p>	<p>Medium term to Long term</p>
<p>8. <b>Pursue discussions with York Region and the York Region Arts Council around the development of a regional Rural Arts Festival that includes opportunities to showcase local artists as well as workshops on a wide range of topics from starting a business, fundraising, marketing, to skills development.</b></p>	<p>Region of York, York Region Arts Council</p>	<p>Medium term to Long term</p>



**Performance Measures:**

- **Number of new business incorporations in East Gwillimbury**
- **Number of East Gwillimbury firms in the health industries sector**
- **Number of new immigrants who reside in East Gwillimbury**
- **Funding commitment to support the new post-secondary campus in East Gwillimbury**
- **Attendance at the Rural Arts Festival**
- **Number of local food initiatives developed**





#### 4.4.3 To support the expansion of business investment opportunities in the Town`s urban and rural areas

Required Actions	Potential Partners	Timing
<p>1. Give consideration to the branding and marketing of a ‘gateway’ business park in the Highway 404 corridor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using the framework of a Community Improvement Plan consider providing financial incentives to attract development (e.g. Windsor).</li> </ul>	Town of East Gwillimbury Departments, Business Development Committee	Short term
<p>2. Initiate a streamlined development approvals process for projects that advance the goals and objectives of the Town as it relates to creating serviced and shovel-ready employment areas. As part of this effort the Town should communicate its intent to the development and brokerage community as a method of differentiating itself from other competitive communities (e.g. Markham).</p>	Town of East Gwillimbury Departments	Short term to medium term
<p>3. Support live-work arrangements as a way to attract workers in the knowledge-based industries sector. This could be accommodated within the village core areas of the community where retail is provided at grade with office and residential development above grade (e.g. Squamish, British Columbia).</p>	Town of East Gwillimbury Departments	Short term to long term
<p>4. Move forward with the implementation of the Town’s broadband strategy as a means to attract knowledge based industries and encourage both home occupations and new business investment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with service providers as a means to expedite and expand the broadband telecommunications network.</li> <li>Explore the benefit of becoming an ‘intelligent community.’</li> </ul>	OMAFRA, Region of York, Southlake CFDC, Internet Service Providers	Short-term to medium term.
<p>5. Promote and market the efforts of the Town of East Gwillimbury to become a sustainable community, as well as the opportunities the region offers for the development of industries such as alternative energy development, bio-products, educational programming, green building product manufacturing etc.</p>	Local municipalities, Region of York, Business Development Committee	Short term to medium term



<p>6. <b>Be proactive and practical about the Town’s business growth. To ensure economic sustainability and future employment for residents, the Town should be focused on targeting business investment and attraction in the following areas:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Health Industries (e.g. high value manufacturing of health products and wholesale trade – medical, dental and hospital equipment and supplies)</b></li> <li>• <b>Business + Professional Services (e.g. architecture and engineering services, computer design services)</b></li> <li>• <b>Green Industries (e.g. sustainable building construction)</b></li> </ul>	<p>Northern 6 local municipalities, Region of York</p>	<p>Medium term to long term</p>
<p>7. <b>Undertake business retention and expansion (BR+E) program that includes regular business visitation surveys, documentation, and analysis that can be used to inform business of the local investment potential and inform the Town’s marketing efforts.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use the results of the BR+E to identify and develop local business success stories.</b></li> </ul>	<p>Southlake CFDC, Business Development Committee</p>	<p>Medium term to long-term</p>
<p>8. <b>Allow additional uses on agricultural land such as home occupations, home industry and uses that provide value-added products from the farm industry, secondary uses, such as herb gardens, cottage industry and uses by colleges and universities for agricultural research purposes that will allow for a more sustainable agricultural base and take advantage of the rural locations proximity to urban areas and markets.</b></p>	<p>Town of East Gwillimbury Departments, Region of York</p>	<p>Medium term to long term</p>
<p>9. <b>As the economic development strategy is implemented and specific actions or initiatives launched, the Town should ensure that information is shared with colleagues across all departments.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prepare an annual report to Council on all actions and achievements across departments in implementing the economic development strategy.</b></li> </ul>	<p>Town of East Gwillimbury Departments</p>	<p>Short term to long term</p>



**Performance Measures:**

- Total number of jobs in East Gwillimbury compared to the Places to Grow jobs target
- Number of jobs and businesses in environmental industries, health industries, business and professional services
- Number of jobs and businesses in small and medium sized enterprises
- Telecommunications percentage coverage across East Gwillimbury
- Number of business success stories developed as part of the BR+E project
- Amount of infrastructure funding to support shovel ready development in the Town's Highway 404 employment area.
- Number of residents who live and work in East Gwillimbury
- Amount of commercial space available (sq.ft.) at grade and above grade
- Number of home base businesses in rural areas
- Number of days a development application is received to a building permit is issued