



Town of
East Gwillimbury



Report of the Business Retention and Expansion Program 2006



BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION



Program Background

What were the Program's Objectives?

The objectives of this program were to:

- actively demonstrate our community's pro-business attitude;
- help existing businesses solve problems;
- assist businesses in using existing programs aimed at helping them become more competitive;
- create a forum in which sensitive information on the needs and complaints of businesses can be addressed effectively, yet confidentially; and
- collect data on our community's strengths and weaknesses as a place to do business.

What was the Process?

- Community leaders throughout East Gwillimbury were invited to join a Business Retention & Expansion Task Force to conduct a survey of local businesses after participating in a comprehensive training session. Upon completion of the survey, the Program Coordinator reviewed the data and responded to the immediate concerns. Over 86% of the seventy-one businesses surveyed were provided with additional information.
- The survey data was entered into specifically designed software, ensuring the business information remained confidential. A statistical analysis was conducted, and a report was prepared for the Task Force.
- The survey results were shared with the Task Force and priority areas were identified that would significantly enhance the business climate of the East Gwillimbury business community. Goals and action items to meet the identified needs were developed, and with the assistance and support of the partners and the Business Development Committee, will be implemented.
- The goals and action plans identified by the Task Force are included in this report.

Program Background

Who was Involved?

The Town of East Gwillimbury, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, South Lake Community Futures Development Corporation, and the East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce funded this initiative.

The contracted coordinator, along with fifty invited community volunteers and elected and appointed representatives from the municipality, interviewed business owners from June to September 2006, using the standardized Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs Business Retention and Expansion survey.

Who Did What?

The East Gwillimbury BR&E Leadership Committee:

Norma McNeill & Paul Mayhew, Co-Chairs

Karen Armstrong

Peter Budreo

Bradley Goodwin

Marlene Johnston

Bob Pritchett

Kathy Simpson

Dan Stone

BRE Coordinator: Peter Paz

BREI Consultant: Valerie Ryan, Nottawasaga Futures

Consultation Procedure

“Red Flags”?

One of the key aspects that significantly contributed to the success of this program is the quick response by the Coordinator to what has been termed “Red Flag Issues.” The BR&E Co-ordinator reviewed the surveys within two days after the survey was completed and responded immediately to the “red flag” issues expressed by the businesses.

The criterion used for red flags were:

- a) Business closing or downsizing;
- b) Business relocating;
- c) Business expanding; and
- d) Request for information.

Over 86% of the seventy-one businesses surveyed were provided with additional information.

What Were the “Red Flags”?

- Red Flag issues were resolved on an issue by issue basis by delivering, in a timely manner, individually prepared information packages to business requesting additional support or information. Only one company specifically requested assistance with regards to their business closing and a quick response from the team resulted in several meetings to provide information and assistance with financial sourcing and planning, business planning, and marketing.

The most common "Red Flag" information requests were regarding:

- Succession Planning
- Energy Efficiency
- Financial information and financial sourcing
- Business planning
- Employee retention
- Marketing strategies
- Waste product recovery

- Information was gathered primarily from federal, provincial, and regional government websites although information from the private sector and community organizations was also included. Also representatives from the ministries and departments were also asked specifically for additional back-up materials/information.

Survey Information

Who Replied to the Survey?

- Seventy-one businesses were selected as a representative sample of the Town of East Gwillimbury's business community.



- As determined by the Task Force Committee, emphasis was placed on the manufacturing sector with random sampling in effect.

- The sample included a range of different size businesses: 50% employed <5 employees, 15% had 5 to 9 employees, 21% had 10 to 29 employees and 14% had 30 or more employees. The majority of businesses were classified as corporations (50%), 35% were sole proprietorships, and 3 were franchises.
- Approximately 56% of the businesses have been in operation more than ten years in East Gwillimbury. In fact, 25% of the businesses had been in the community for more than twenty-five years. Most of the respondents (90%) were involved in the business on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, East Gwillimbury was the sole location for most of the businesses (81%).
- The businesses served local, Canadian domestic, and international markets. Sixteen companies export their products to the U.S.A. and eleven internationally.

Action Items and Potential Partners

Communication of Accurate Business Information

Objective:

The development of educational/information products to ensure businesses better understand the scope of the restrictions (legal, provincial/federal responsibility or regulation) and government financial constraints.

Goals:

1. To develop and deliver comprehensive, coordinated community and government information to provide up-to-date information on the support, tools, and resources available to businesses.
2. To encourage more open dialogue between all levels (municipal, regional, provincial and federal) of government, business organizations, school boards, business community, and residents to ensure accurate exchange of information regarding areas of responsibility, regulations, business support tools and resources.

Actions:

- Review and brainstorm innovative communication strategies to ensure on-going communication between the municipality and local businesses. This action to be led by the Business Development Committee, Town of East Gwillimbury
- The continuation of future customer surveys
- The creation of an innovative customer service approach

Potential Partners:

- The Town of East Gwillimbury
- Federal, Provincial and Regional (York) representatives
- East Gwillimbury Business Development Committee
- Private Sector
- Business Owners
- East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce
- Local Business Associations (e.g., Mount Albert Business Association)

Action Items and Potential Partners

Human Resource Recruitment, Business and Human Resource Education and Training

Objective:

Increase local business' awareness of business and human resource educational/training opportunities and cost effective recruitment strategies.

Goals:

1. Provide up-to-date research on current and future local area labour force requirements, trends, and availability.
2. Provide East Gwillimbury businesses with effective, low cost business education and training opportunities such as apprenticeship programs for skilled trades, health and safety, waste product and productivity improvement (lean manufacturing) strategies.
3. Increase businesses awareness of effective, low cost human resource recruitment strategies.

Action Item:

- The establishment of a community council that will develop a communication strategy which will focus on business education and training and human resource recruitment within the local area.

Potential Partners:

- The Town of East Gwillimbury
- The Region of York
- The East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce
- South Lake Community Futures Development Corporation
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
- Local Business Associations
- Educational Institutions and Boards of Education
- York South Simcoe Training and Adjustment Board

Action Items and Potential Partners

Broadband Infrastructure

Objective:

To improve telecommunications infrastructure to enable access to wireless high-speed internet access.

Goal:

1. Provide the East Gwillimbury business community and residents with reliable wireless broadband services.

Action Items:

- Start acting on broadband opportunities which exist locally
- Commission an engineering study
- Seek infrastructure funding
- Begin deployment of complete wireless service within the Municipality

Potential Partners:

- Town of East Gwillimbury
- East Gwillimbury Business Development Committee
- East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce
- Local Business Associations
- The Region of York
- South Lake Community Futures Development Corporation
- Private Sector
- Representatives from the Provincial and Federal governments

Action Items and Potential Partners

Energy Conservation and Efficiency

Objective:

Increase energy conservation and efficiency to ensure the ability of existing and new businesses to expand and maintain or increase productivity.

Goals:

1. To provide local businesses with the educational/information materials needed to seek advice with regards to energy conservation and efficiency.
2. Provide innovative energy solutions for East Gwillimbury businesses.

Actions:

- Provide information on energy efficiency and conservation programs available from the federal government
- Provide educational services with respect to conservation through newsletters, etc.
- Research and implement an innovative energy supply for the municipality
- Implement waste initiatives for business owners.

Potential Partners:

- The Town of East Gwillimbury
- Private Sector Partners
- South Lake Community Development Futures Corporation
- Energy advisors from the Provincial and Federal governments
- East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce
- Local Business Associations
- Representatives from the Energy Sector

Action Items and Potential Partners

Retail District Beautification and Identity

Objective

To create identifiable commercial districts that portray a safe, pleasurable, shopping environment.

Goals:

1. Identify creative strategies that create downtown areas which the community can be proud.
2. To support the retail sector and its role in anchoring downtown cores.

Action Items:

- Review the potential for creating a Business Improvement Association
- Apply for heritage status where applicable
- Create a community branding strategy in the individual commercial districts (e.g., Big Box complex and Mount Albert downtown core)

Action Items (con't)

- Develop better commercial district signage to ensure safety as an integral part of a commercial marketing strategy
- Provide tax incentives for businesses to improve their building facades
- Develop a strategy to reduce/remove identified buildings that are vacant or in disrepair.
- Ensure “pedestrian-friendly” commercial districts where applicable.

Potential Partners:

- Mount Albert Business Association
- South Lake Community Futures Development Corporation
- The Town of East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce
- Town of East Gwillimbury
- Heritage East Gwillimbury
- Local Business Associations
- Local Business Owners

Action Items and Potential Partners

Business Development

Objective:

Ensure East Gwillimbury businesses have the necessary tools, resources, and supports required to maintain or expand their enterprise.

Goals:

1. Increase awareness of existing supports to local businesses.
2. Develop on-going communication strategies between service providers and businesses to ensure resources, tools, and supports are available to meet business needs in a timely manner.

Action Items

- Review and disseminate information to local businesses on existing programs and unique opportunities to increase awareness in related areas (e.g., financial sourcing, business and marketing plans).
- Facilitate the development of a buyer-supplier network.
- Develop on-going communication strategies between local businesses and service providers to ensure future needs are met.

Potential Partners:

- South Lake Community Futures Development Corporation
- Local Business Associations
- The Town of East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce
- Town of East Gwillimbury
- Local Business Owners
- Government Representatives

Action Items and Potential Partners

This successful program is the result of the hard work of over 50 volunteers and their dedication to the continued development of the Town of East Gwillimbury business community.

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• . . . And all 71 local businesses!