

2023-2027

Growing North Durham

Rural Economic Development
Action Plan

 **Invest
Durham**
Agriculture & Rural



Acknowledgement

Durham Region is located on the traditional lands of the Mississauga Peoples. While the Region has started its journey to develop meaningful relationships and work toward reconciliation with local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, we recognize and acknowledge that a more comprehensive approach to reconciliation is needed to address systemic inequities and racism; and to better support, celebrate and deliver services to Indigenous Peoples in the region. We give this acknowledgement to show respect to the First Peoples who inhabited this land and to remind ourselves of the importance of strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities and of our continuing commitment to do better.

This strategy endeavours to support the creation of economic opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds, identities, abilities, lifestyles and life stages; and aims to create an inclusive prosperous future for everyone.

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Executive Summary

The three northern Townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge within the Region of Durham, have been identified as “north Durham”. Covering approximately half of the total land area of the region, north Durham is home to about 8 percent of Durham Region’s population with modest growth expected. Its rural character, unique villages and natural landscape makes north Durham distinct from the rest of the region.

In 2013 the Vibrant North Durham Economic Development Plan (VND Plan) was created. Through a collaborative economic development process, the three individual townships comprising north Durham identified common economic challenges and opportunities and recognized the benefits of coordinating resources. To continue building a dynamic and resilient economy ready to face challenges presented locally and globally, north Durham recognizes the impact of intentionally working together to reinforce the advantage of being heard as one voice. Like the first plan, the Growing North Durham: Rural Economic Development Action Plan (Growing North Durham Plan) intends to be a cohesive five-year living document guiding economic development thinking, processes, and projects within the three Townships.

In advance of preparing the updated plan and its high-level economic development strategies, an extensive review of relevant plans and reports from various governments and agencies was conducted. Durham Region economic development staff also reviewed and updated the “North Durham by the Numbers” document (Appendix 1) to ensure that current demographic and economic data was considered while preparing this renewed strategy. Background research and data provided a solid foundation for analyzing perceptions and realities in north Durham. This step was critical in understanding current trends to inform the updated economic development planning.

Community engagement was also an important component in developing the revised Plan. Considerable attention was dedicated to consultation at the community level to reflect on the successes of the first Plan and to build impactful strategies for the next five years. The collaborative participation of community members, elected officials and staff was essential in developing fresh ideas and relevant directions.

Following a review of the four strategies from the VND Plan, and input provided from stakeholders, it was determined that the Growing North Durham Plan would focus on three key pillars that will act as the foundation of economic development in north Durham moving forward.

These three pillars are:



To implement the objectives and actions listed under each key pillar, each Township will embark on developing Township Implementation Plans. The Implementation Plans should be crafted with input from both regional and municipal staff, Council, the broader business community (e.g. economic development committees, boards of trade, chambers of commerce, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), etc.), the community at large, and other supportive partner organizations. The Implementation Plans will reflect the priorities and resources of each Township, while being open to collaborative opportunities where the advantage for north Durham to speak as one voice is reinforced.



Introduction

Purpose of the Plan

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way in which economies of virtually any scale operate. Whether we think of issues that have existed for many years but have been exacerbated by the pandemic, such as the need for reliable broadband in Durham Region's rural areas, or newer trends such as the increased prevalence of teleworking and home-based businesses, economic development policies, programs and initiatives need to reflect these evolving circumstances. The updated Growing North Durham Plan will be a living document outlining strategic directions that will help north Durham realize its economic potential over the next five years.

The 2013-2018 VND Plan was highly effective at coordinating efforts to enact a wide range of economic development activities across north Durham. Extensive and individualized Township Action Plans were created by municipal and regional staff with input from councillors and volunteers from local economic development advisory committees. Leads were assigned to each action item and ongoing monitoring occurred during the life of the first Plan. Annual progress reports were provided to each Township Council. Many of the actions had been accomplished or were well underway by 2018. For this reason, the following updated strategies and subsequent implementation plans reflect the changing economic environment and emerging opportunities in north Durham will ensure this momentum will continue.

Why North Durham?

While the Townships of Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock are unique from one another in many ways, they also share many similarities that warrant a north Durham approach. All three northern Townships are in immediate need of broadband improvements to ensure that reliable high-speed internet is available to all businesses and residents as the economy continues to go digital. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated labour shortages across a wide variety of industries which is proving to be a difficult hurdle for many rural businesses. Simultaneously, the pandemic has increased interest in rural living, placing north Durham in a unique position as a group of rural communities within commuting distance of Toronto and other Greater Toronto Area (GTA) locations.

From an environmental perspective, north Durham is located almost entirely in Ontario's Greenbelt and/or the Oak Ridges Moraine. Despite comprising more than 50 per cent of the region's total land base, Durham Region's northern Townships account for about 8 percent of the region's total population. While important for environmental preservation and sustainability, these conditions limit development. This highlights the need for north Durham's employment areas to be adequately pre-serviced to help attract investment to offset the residential tax base.

The similar socio-economic circumstances, natural features, challenges, and opportunities justify a north Durham approach. The intent is not to create a north versus south Durham ideology, but rather coordinate efforts, share resources and speak as one voice to ensure that the economic needs of Durham Region's rural municipalities are being heard and addressed beyond municipal boundaries.



Related Strategies and Plans

Regional Economic Development and Tourism Strategy

The Region's Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and Action Plan ([Ready Set Future: A PLACE Blueprint for Durham](#)) sets out a vision for Durham three decades into the future, including long-term aspirations focused on People, Location, Acceleration, Creativity and Enablers (PLACE) which complement the pillars identified within this Plan. Within the Region's Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and Action Plan is specific reference to the Growing North Durham Plan and actions to advance economic development initiatives in north Durham. The Growing North Durham Plan will support the implementation of the Regional Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and Action Plan and ensures north Durham is adequately represented for the significant contributions made to the regional economy.

Tourism and Agri-Food

The Region of Durham, Townships of Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock and other partners involved in the development of this plan recognize the immense value that both agri-food and tourism provide to the north Durham economy. Due to the limited expansion opportunities that exists throughout north Durham because of the Provincial Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine, these two industries are critical to the well-being of the north Durham economy. Neither agriculture or tourism are explicitly referenced throughout this plan, due to the existence of standalone strategic action plans that outline detailed projects and initiatives that will be undertaken to support these industries over the next several years. [The Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan: A 5-year Action Plan](#) was endorsed in June 2022, while the Durham Tourism Action Plan will be developed throughout 2023.

Broadband

The need for fast and reliable broadband in every corner of north Durham is also recognized as a strategic priority. While project support, information-sharing, and advocacy efforts are included within this plan, the Region of Durham has set up a team of dedicated professionals who are working to get broadband infrastructure built-out across the region. This work also has a standalone strategic plan, "[Connecting our Communities: A Broadband Strategy for Durham Region](#)".







Laying the Foundation

for Economic Development
in North Durham

2018 and Earlier

The foundations of economic development in north Durham were established with the 2013-2018 VND Plan. It was developed as a cohesive 5-year plan to implement economic development thinking, processes, and projects in north Durham. The VND Plan entrenched a coordinated approach to economic development amongst the Townships of Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock with support from the Region of Durham.

The Plan identified 4 key strategies to build a dynamic and resilient economy:

-  1. Be open for business
-  2. Inspire and support entrepreneurship
-  3. Create a vibrant future for young adults
-  4. Build a stronger rural and small-town identity

In addition to the VND Plan, action plans were developed for each Township identifying specific actions to implement the 4 key strategies. Annual updates on the action plans were provided to each Township Council giving insight on the progress of the VND Plan. The Economic Development Advisory Committee's in each Township provided valuable guidance throughout the development and implementation of the VND Plan.



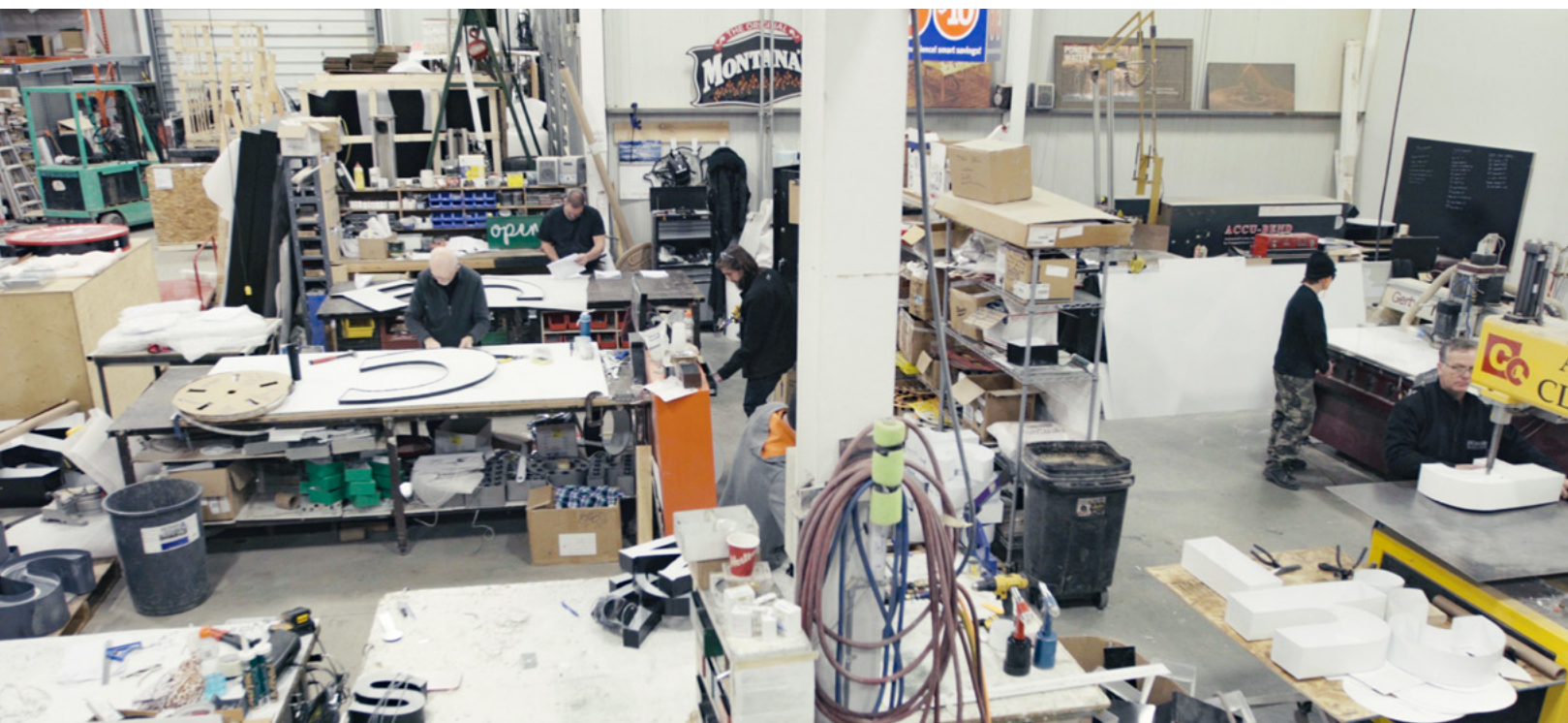
2019 and beyond

In 2019, the process to update the VND Plan for the next 5 years was initiated. The Ainley Group was retained to assist with leading the engagement activities and developing a draft final report. Throughout the spring of 2019, facilitated engagement sessions were held in each northern municipality as well as a fourth engagement session with participants from across north Durham. Throughout this period of engagement, business support organizations (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, BIAs, Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Committees, etc.) were invited to participate. In addition to leading facilitated engagement, the consultants reviewed several documents including the Agriculture Strategy, Official Plans, Community Tourism Plans, among others to understand programming and policy implications.

An economic analysis was undertaken titled “North Durham by the Numbers” which has been updated regularly as new data becomes available. This data informs and validates the feedback provided through the consultation process and assists with identifying actions based on both qualitative and quantitative sources.

A draft report was completed by the consultant and circulated to senior leadership at each municipality for initial review. Several updates were made over the preceding months, however unexpected factors such as staff changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the update process and temporarily refocused priorities.

The current iteration of the Plan has been formulated using the draft report and consultation sessions completed by the Ainley Group, data gathered and analyzed by staff and with the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it will factor into the economic future of north Durham. It has been developed by regional economic development staff who have relied on the ongoing support and guidance of municipal staff and the Economic Development Advisory Committees (EDACs).





An Informed Action Plan

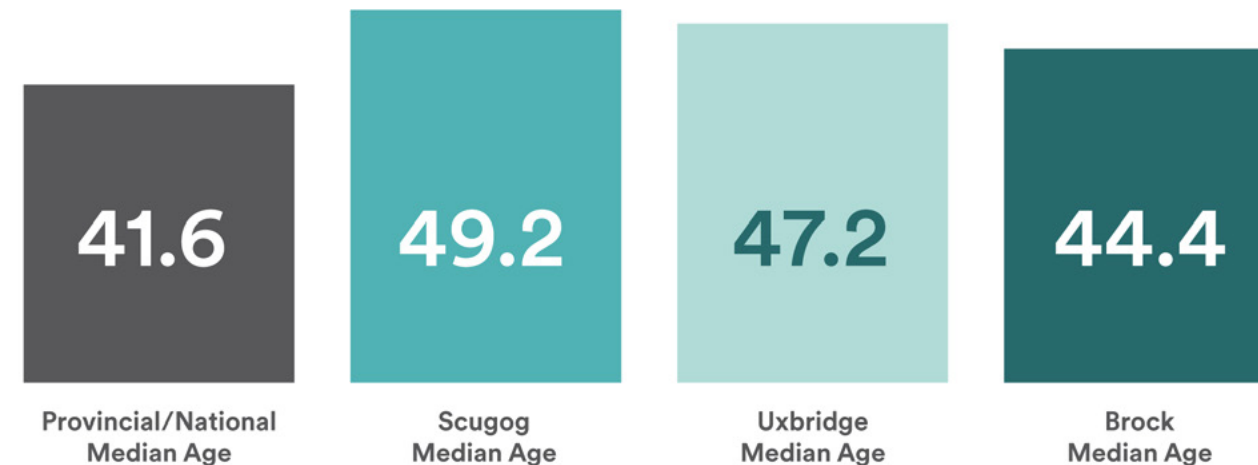
The pillars, goals, objectives, and actions outlined within this plan were developed following research, public consultation, and data analysis to ensure that appropriate economic and social needs within north Durham are being addressed.

Economic Snapshot

The economic snapshot below is a high-level summary of socio-economic data specific to north Durham. For more detailed socio-economic data, refer to North Durham by the Numbers (Appendix 1).



North Durham is expected to see modest population growth over the next 5 years as the combined population of Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock is estimated to grow by about 5% (approximately 58,800 people to 61,850 people).



The north Durham population is considerably older than the provincial or national average. The median age in Ontario and Canada is about 41.6 years compared to 49.2 in Scugog, 47.2 in Uxbridge and 44.4 in Brock.



Using Canada as a benchmark, north Durham has a high concentration of jobs in agriculture, construction, and arts/entertainment/recreation.



There were approximately 18,389 jobs across north Durham in 2022. There were an additional 5,573 self-employed jobs across the three communities for a total of 23,962 jobs.



Small businesses are the heart of the north Durham economy as 85% of Brock businesses, 79% of Scugog businesses and 73% of Uxbridge businesses have 1 – 9 employees. This is compared to 69% of Durham Region businesses.



In 2022, north Durham was home to approximately 2,037 businesses with employees.



The majority of employed north Durham residents are leaving north Durham for work. This is most evident in construction, educational services and public administration. However, Scugog and Uxbridge experienced a positive influx of people who work in jobs in the arts, creative and entertainment industry.

Consultation and Feedback

Throughout spring 2019, several facilitated engagement sessions were conducted to form the basis of the updated Growing North Durham Plan. A session was held with each north Durham Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) as well as a Tri-EDAC session where all three EDACs were consulted together. A report card was circulated in advance of each session and participants were given an opportunity to review what was completed between 2013 – 2019 and reflect on opportunities going forward.

In 2022, staff led additional consultation sessions with each EDAC (Uxbridge EDAC on April 28, Scugog EDAC on May 13 and Brock on June 9). An online survey was also distributed to each EDAC contact list to gather additional feedback on the Growing North Durham Plan.

In addition to presenting the Growing North Durham Plan to north Durham stakeholders, one of the main goals of the 2022 engagement sessions was to identify north Durham's value proposition in the eyes of local business leaders, elected officials and residents.

The following word cloud illustrates some common themes.



Key Pillars

This Plan focuses on three key pillars:



People



Places



Prosperity

A specific set of objectives and actions have been identified for each pillar. Township-specific implementation plans will be developed for each municipality to provide further direction and clarity on how actions can be implemented to best reflect the specific needs and resources of each municipality.



“This pillar is about recognizing the strong correlation between human capital and economic growth.”

More than 54,000 people call the Townships of Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock home. While growth over the next decade is predicted to be modest, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased interest in the lifestyle offerings of rural areas and highlighted that people are one of north Durham’s greatest assets. This pillar is about recognizing the strong correlation between human capital and economic growth. It focuses on expanding the knowledge and skills of people and recognizing that investments in our workforce, including expanding opportunities for people from historically underserved communities, can contribute to a diverse employment base and other positive local impacts.



What is human capital?

Human capital can be broadly defined as the stock of knowledge, skills and other personal characteristics embodied in people that helps them to be productive. Pursuing formal education (early childhood, formal school system, adult training programs) but also informal and on-the-job learning and work experience all represent investment in human capital.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development:
[oecd.org/economy/human-capital](https://www.oecd.org/economy/human-capital)

Goal Area: Support Entrepreneurship

Objective: Foster north Durham’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

➔ Actions:

- Re-introduce and host the annual North Durham Building Business Forum (BBF).
- Work with partners to develop, support and/or expand the reach of entrepreneurship programming in north Durham (Business Advisory Centre Durham, Building Youth Capacity, Uxbridge Youth Centre, etc.)
- Build connections with the home-based business community to support targeted business growth.
- Share relevant information with entrepreneurs and the greater business community (e.g. business support programs, funding opportunities for start-up businesses, events, webinars, etc.)

Goal Area: Skills, Talent and Workforce Development

Objective: Attract and retain a skilled workforce that meets the needs of the north Durham economy.

➔ Actions:

- Conduct a skills gap analysis and commuter study for north Durham businesses to identify current/future needs and better understand how north Durham can capitalize on changing working conditions.
- Use skills-gap analysis and commuter study data to develop sector-specific workforce strategies.
- Work with secondary and post-secondary institutions to explore solutions to address workforce challenges, including micro-credentials and upskilling opportunities (e.g. promote the Tap into Talent campaign).
- Partner with Durham Workforce Authority and Durham College Community Employment Services to raise awareness of workforce resources available to businesses.
- Build on Region-wide efforts to create a ‘Magnetic Region’ marketing program with an intentional approach for north Durham (e.g. ‘boomerang’ for youth) – use the data from skills-gap analysis and commuter study to shape marketing programs.

Goal Area: Foster the Innovation Economy

Objective: North Durham businesses are recognized as a pivotal component of Durham Region’s innovation community.

➔ Actions:

- Showcase innovation success stories from north Durham.
- Connect businesses and business support organizations with funding and resources aimed at enhancing digital literacy and online presence (e.g. Digital Mainstreet.)
- Connect aspiring innovators and existing businesses with post-secondary institutions, incubators, accelerators and other resources available to the innovation community across the region (e.g. post-secondary Tactical Teams, Spark Centre, 1855 Accelerator.)
- Create relationships with key businesses to deliver programs and services that support the adoption of new technologies and innovative approaches to doing business.





“This pillar is about highlighting and strengthening north Durham’s unique qualities of place that stimulate meaningful connections with the community.”

Home to a thriving arts scene, endless outdoor recreational activities and a strong agri-food community, the Townships of Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock offer a unique and increasingly sought-after lifestyle combining urban excitement and country charm. This pillar is about highlighting and strengthening north Durham’s unique qualities of place that stimulate meaningful connections with the community. Actions under this pillar will aim to promote and enhance the features that make north Durham a desirable, competitive, and economically vibrant place for a diverse range of businesses, workforce and talent.

Goal Area: Showcase North Durham

Objective: Highlight north Durham’s value proposition, assets and quality of place to potential investors, businesses and talent.

➔ Actions:

- Develop multi-media campaigns to promote north Durham’s value proposition to domestic and international audiences.
- Highlight business success stories from north Durham through Invest Durham and Durham Tourism marketing channels.

Goal Area: Welcome New and Diverse Businesses

Objective: North Durham is a welcoming community that appeals to a diverse range of businesses, workforce, and talent.

➔ Actions:

- Partner to deliver targeted training to employers on culture, leadership, immigration and diversity, well-being, and skilled workforce attraction.
- Work with local business support organizations to re-initiate Red Welcome Wagon Programs.
- Partner with OMAFRA to produce a Market Area Data Report and Market Threshold Analysis for north Durham to identify potential business opportunities.
- Undertake targeted business attraction efforts to entice a diverse range of businesses to locate in strategic commercial/industrial areas across north Durham.

Goal Area: Vibrant Downtowns

Objective: The economic and social vibrancy of north Durham’s downtowns are enhanced through ongoing downtown revitalization programming and community economic development efforts.

➔ Actions:

- Support the implementation of downtown revitalization action plans (e.g. My Downtown Uxbridge) and/or review and existing action plans (e.g. Shop Brock).
- Maintain a current inventory of vacant storefronts in downtowns and promote to new or expanding businesses.
- Build on the prominent arts and culture scene in north Durham by encouraging and supporting place-making initiatives in downtowns (e.g. town squares, murals, beautification, etc.)



“The prosperity pillar is about business retention and making informed decisions to encourage and enable economic growth.”

The Latin origins of the word prosperous mean “doing well” and this pillar aims to see north Durham thrive. The prosperity pillar is about business retention and making informed decisions to encourage and enable economic growth (e.g. sanitary sewer, water, transit, etc). Building off the success of the 2013-2018 VND Plan, this pillar goes a step further in recognizing that economic development not only plays a key role in ensuring north Durham is vibrant but also enables residents and businesses to prosper for years to come.

Goal Area: Business Retention & Expansion

Objective: Retain existing businesses and support their expansion in north Durham to create new jobs as 76 – 90 percent of new jobs come from already existing businesses (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs - OMAFRA).

➔ Actions:

- Establish a standardized business visitation program across north Durham to develop relationships with businesses (identify challenges/ opportunities, provide resources (where appropriate), and establish baseline data for year over year comparison).
- Execute and implement project-based Business Retention and Expansion programming using the OMAFRA model (e.g. Scugog BR+E program).

Goal Area: Investment Readiness

Objective: The north Durham communities are investment ready and can effectively respond to investment inquiries while supporting local business expansions and improvements.

➔ Actions:

- Complete an Investment Readiness Self-Assessment and develop a process to effectively respond to investment inquiries for north Durham.
- In coordination with Planning staff, develop and maintain an inventory of investment-ready industrial and commercial properties available in north Durham.
- Act on opportunities to better leverage available Community Improvement (CIP) programs to support economic development efforts, including participation in the budget planning process, gathering advice from economic development committees and enhanced promotion of CIP programs to building and/or business owners.
- Compile and share current community and economic data:
 - Develop updated community profiles for all three north Durham townships ensuring that they are kept up to date as new data becomes available and shared with appropriate audiences.
 - Develop online business information toolkits for each north Durham township ensuring they are updated as information changes and proactively share with new, prospective and existing businesses.

Goal Area: Employment Lands, Connectivity and Economic Infrastructure

Objective: Ongoing improvements and expansions of north Durham’s hard and soft infrastructure and employment land allocations are recognized as key drivers of economic prosperity.

➔ Actions:

- Provide connections and support the appropriate staff/teams leading infrastructure projects and improvements in north Durham (e.g. broadband, transit, etc.)
- Continue advocacy efforts to expand and/or service employment areas in north Durham.
- Work with South Lake Community Futures Development Corporation to increase their existing presence in Brock Township.
- Explore opportunities to expand the South Lake Community Futures Development Corporation catchment area into the Townships of Scugog and Uxbridge.
- Share information related to progress being made on infrastructure initiatives.

Next Steps/Implementation

With support from Durham Region’s northern municipalities, north Durham business support organizations (Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, BIAs) and local economic development committees, township-specific implementation plans will be developed to outline localized actions that align with the overarching pillars, goals, objectives and actions outlined above. Activities, leads, partners and timelines will be identified within each township action plan to ensure that implementation of the Growing North Durham Plan remains achievable and on track. Progress will be monitored regularly, and adjustments may be made to the plan as economic circumstances evolve, both locally and more broadly.




- Premium Organic Coffee, Teas & Smoothies
- Body & Beauty Boutique
- Everyday Essentials & Gifts

Good Times



InvestDurham.ca

 Durham Region, Ontario, Canada

If this information is required in an accessible format, please contact Economic Development and Tourism at 905-668-4113, ext. 2619.