

TOWN OF AJAX REPORT



REPORT TO: Community Affairs and Planning

SUBMITTED BY: Paul Allore, Director of Planning & Development Services

PREPARED BY: Lisa Hausz, Manager of Business Development & Marketing

SUBJECT: Ajax Competitive Ready Designation

WARD(S): All

DATE OF MEETING: September 4, 2012

REFERENCE: GGC Report March 8, 2012 – Contract Award Chabin Concepts
Economic Development & Tourism Strategy 2010-2020
Community Action Plan 2011-2014
Capital Account No. 931011: Investment Readiness Designation

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the report entitled 'Ajax Competitive Ready Designation' dated September 4, 2012 to the Community Affairs and Planning Committee be received for information.**

BACKGROUND:

Beginning with the 2005 Economic Development Strategy, and continuing in the 2010 Economic Development & Tourism Strategy, key objectives were identified in order to strengthen the Town's position for investment attraction. In both strategies it has been recommended to take a strong review of the Town's 'readiness' for investment. Prior to, and since the development and implementation of the 2010 strategy, several steps have been taken to prepare Ajax for investment including:

- Pre-zoning of all employment areas
- Servicing of employment areas
- Completion of an Employment Land Strategy
- Completion of Target Market mapping to employment areas
- Implementation of the award-winning Corporate Calling program
- Launch of the Economic Development website
- Launch of the *PriorityPath* program
- Launch of the Lead Management process
- Launch of the *OnTrack 2015 by 2015* job awareness campaign

Since 2009, the Business Development team has been internally monitoring investment readiness according to standards set in both the United States and the Province of Ontario. The annual workplan included initiatives in accordance with the Province's '*Municipal Checklist for Investment Readiness Guide*' in preparation of an external evaluation in several areas:

- Economic Development Planning
- Sustainable Land-Use Planning
- Utilization of Planning Financial Tools and Incentives
- Processes, Practices and Partnerships
- Marketing

The next step was an objective third party evaluation. There are unique benefits obtained through a third party evaluation, specifically through the Competitive Ready designation process, including:

- Provides Ajax with a foundation or benchmark of the numerous factors businesses may use to evaluate the community—designed using site selection industry standards
- Objectively identifies, opportunities, issues and recommendations
- Provides Ajax with a basis for continuous improvements
- Recognizes best practices and “best in class”

In February 2012, Council authorized staff to move forward in pursuing the Competitive Ready seal, that provides Ajax with an expert validation by an external third party.

DISCUSSION:

The pursuit of the Competitive Ready seal involved three main components that required extensive engagement between departments and the community. As part of the process several tasks were assigned to the Town in preparation of the on-site assessment. These tasks included gathering specific information related to three key areas of the 'Competitive Ready' audit: a community snapshot, mock site selection exercise, and the on-site validation of over 175 scoring factors broken down into the following ten categories:



The *CompetitiveReady Seal* comprises 10 Assessment Categories

The categories are part of the Competitive Ready 'asset mapping'. Asset mapping involves documenting the tangible and intangible resources of a community. Assets may be persons, physical structures, natural resources, institutions, businesses, or informal organizations.

- **The 10 scored categories** of readiness for business investment provides Ajax with an overall score based on the evidence provided through interviews, documents and the on-site visit.

- **Readiness factors** within each category are given a competitiveness score, accompanied by specific comments and recommendations that Ajax can leverage for investment attraction and continuous improvement. An example of the factors include:
 - **Global Positioning:** location, access to air, rail and ports, roadways and highways
 - **Real Estate:** zoned industrial areas, research parks, office buildings, serviced land, buildings
 - **Physical Infrastructure:** road conditions, utilities, rail, public transportation, capital projects
 - **Human Capital:** workforce availability, workforce skills, wages, unions, training
 - **Organizational Effectiveness:** staff, professional development, economic development funding, business tracking, work plans, private sector engagement, economic development partners, communication and marketing plans
 - **Business Climate:** permitting process, internal process, development committee/teams, incentives and incentive policies, taxes, business retention and expansion programs
 - **Business Resources:** Business retention and expansion programs and effectiveness, special programs, associations, manufacturing support, connections with university/college, economic development website
 - **Living Environment:** appearance and pride of community, arts and culture, shopping, lodging, recreation, affordability, housing, crime, fire rating, unique programs/awards
 - **Mitigated Risks:** Emergency Management Plan, natural disasters, weather-related closures, crime, fire ratings
 - **Sustainable Practices:** Integrated Community Sustainability Plan, local energy conservation and recycling programs, green culture, LEED Buildings

This extensive process involved the community in mapping assets and capacity, building relationships, and leveraging internal and external resources to prove that Ajax is ready for investment. For Ajax, this process included:

- 175 scoring factors
- 115 documents reviewed
- 54 interviews
- 40 different websites researched
- 31 organizations represented
- 28 individual or group discussions
- 5 presentations and/or information sessions
- 4 days of touring Ajax
- 1 municipality in Canada to undertake this assessment

Ajax has now completed the Competitive Ready assessment, and has received a community snapshot, an asset inventory, and a proprietary Ajax Asset Scorecard with recommendations for raising the score in each category.

Ajax Asset Scorecard

Category	Possible Score	Ajax Score	Ajax Score Percentage
1 Global Positioning	21	16	76%
2 Real Estate	26	20	88%
3 Physical Infrastructure	63	59	98%
4 Human Capital	60	43	85%
5 Organizational Effectiveness	42	36	98%
6 Business Climate	32	25	88%
7 Business Resources	71	51	87%
8 Living Environment	29	22	76%
9 Mitigated Risks	37	31	86%
10 Sustainable Practices	18	14	89%

With the hands-on approach of all departments, the Town of Ajax is the first municipality in Canada to have earned the Competitive Ready designation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Future funding needs will be assessed through the Town's annual budget process.

COMMUNICATION:

Staff have developed a Competitive Ready Communication Plan to communicate with Council, staff, residents, businesses and potential investors. Particulars of the plan include:

- The official Competitive Ready Seal will be incorporated on the website and marketing materials
- Utilize testimonials (print and video) from Competitive Ready evaluation team members for use on website, marketing materials, proposals, etc
- Utilize the Official Competitive Ready Seal Designation letter in proposals
- News release to Town distribution list
- Utilize Competitive Ready Team members as references for prospects

In addition, the Competitive Ready evaluation team will:

- Promote Ajax as a Competitive Ready community
- Post a page and news article about Ajax on the Competitive Ready website
- Send an e-blast to site selector database with over 2,000 contacts
- Send letters to state and provincial officials recognizing Ajax's achievement

CONCLUSION:

With the Salem Road interchange, serviced employment lands and custom processes and tools, the Town of Ajax is ready for investment. The Competitive Ready designation process provided a thorough review of the current economic development and investment factors. The Town has obtained an objective, third-party validation with recommendations for continuous improvement.

Ajax has successfully obtained the Competitive Ready Seal, the first municipality in Canada to do so. This designation provides the Town with the validation and marketing message to assist in attracting investment. It is therefore recommended that Council receive the report *Ajax Competitive Ready Designation* for information.

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