

Town of Innisfil Economic Development

# Annual Activity Report

2024



**Innisfil**  
Economic Development



## 2024 Annual Activity Report

The Town of Innisfil's Economic Development Annual Activity Report provides a summary of our achievements, programming and initiatives over the past 12 months. With approximately 4,795 businesses in Innisfil supporting 14,090 jobs in 2024, our mission is to foster a vibrant and prosperous community that supports innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainability. Thanks to the support of our partners and stakeholders, we made great progress in 2024.

Alongside our colleagues in the Planning & Growth team, and our partners at InnPower and InnServices, we've developed an Investment-Readiness Strategy to accelerate industrial growth in the Innisfil Heights Employment Area. Our team has hosted, supported and sponsored more than 20 events that supported more than 1,500 entrepreneurs, newcomers, students and business leaders. We've further supported existing businesses through new workforce development initiatives, job fairs and promotional campaigns to share the importance of supporting local businesses and employers.

We are excited to share the progress we've made on our key goals and objectives over the past year. We've established a strong economic development foundation which we look forward to building on in 2025. Please enjoy this update and I encourage you to connect with our team if you would like to learn more about what we're doing to support Innisfil's growing economy.

Sincerely,

Laura Thompson

*Manager of Economic Development, Ec.D, (F)*

### Meet the team

**Laura Thompson**

*Manager of Economic Development*

**Jelmer Stegink**

*Economic Development Project Manager*

**Morteza Gharaee**

*DMZ Innisfil Program  
& Community Coordinator*

**Kate Quigley**

*Economic Development Champion*

**Lauren McEachern**

*Economic Development Champion*

**Amber Elliott**

*Marketing & Content Strategist*

**Mary Reinhart**

*Economic Development Support*

**Brenda McBratney**

*Legal Assistant/Economic Development Support*



*Photo taken by Bondi Photography, Innisfil*



## Building a Strong Economic Development Foundation

In 2023, the Innisfil Economic Development team conducted a comprehensive and collaborative process to develop a strategic plan that aligns with the Town's vision and goals. The process involved extensive consultation with more than 300 stakeholders, including community members, business owners, industry experts, and municipal staff culminating in the Town's new Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP). The EDSP was endorsed by Council in December 2023 and implementation began in January 2024.

### Economic Development Strategic Plan

Visit [innisfil.ca/EconomicStrategy](https://innisfil.ca/EconomicStrategy) for more information.

This 3-year plan aims to support strategic growth, guide policy decisions, and facilitate the targeted attraction of businesses and investment in Innisfil. The plan is built around **five strategic goals** that will help us achieve our vision for Innisfil.

- 1 Focus on an investment-ready Innisfil**  
 The Town is well-positioned to capture commercial and industrial investment. Based on Innisfil's location, proximity to the Greater Toronto Area, access to rail and growing population there is a high level of development interest. There is a lack of investment-ready land, so the objectives of this goal are to improve investment-readiness of Innisfil Heights, attract investment in key sectors, and ensure a long-term supply of market-ready office and commercial space.
- 2 Support for an innovation-enabled economy**  
 The purpose of this goal is to leverage Innisfil's reputation as an innovative community to attract and encourage development of new and innovative technologies and processes. The objective is to support increased productivity, economic growth and job creation.
- 3 Further a cohesive community by leveraging tourism and culture**  
 In 2021, the impact of tourism in Ontario was just over \$13 billion and has been rising ever since. The purpose of this goal is to capitalize on pent-up travel demand and leverage Ontario's profile as a tourism destination. The Town intends to do this by developing a cohesive brand, promoting tourism, arts and culture opportunities, supporting further product development and ultimately increasing job creation and economic spending within this sector.
- 4 Enhance community amenities and assets**  
 The objective of this goal is to support the attraction of new residents and talent to Innisfil through the support of community-based initiatives related to housing, downtown revitalization and infrastructure.
- 5 Foster a best-in-class economic development office**  
 The Town of Innisfil Economic Development team has a reputation for delivering best-in-class services. The objective of this goal is to realign the team, workplan and budget to reflect the recommendations of the new Economic Development Strategic Plan, while maintaining customer service excellence.

Innisfil is ranked #11  
 on U-Haul's 2024 Top 25  
 Canadian Growth Cities!



The Innisfil Economic Development Strategic Plan Dashboard provides a comprehensive overview of the Town's progress on 60 action items.

### Track the Economic Development Strategic Plan Progress

Visit [innisfil.ca/EconomicStrategyProgress](https://innisfil.ca/EconomicStrategyProgress)

### Goal #1: Focus on an investment-ready Innisfil

2024 Progress on Goal #1:

- ✦ **EDSP Action 3:** New lead generation and business support pipelines have been established in order to formally track, measure and accelerate responses related to business inquiries. In 2024, staff responded to 179 inquiries, of which 43 were related to new investment opportunities.
- ✦ **EDSP Action 6:** A Site Selection Response Team consisting of members from across the Planning & Growth team, InnServices and InnPower has been established to support site selectors and early-stage development inquiries. This team has supported a major industrial leader, whom in turn has commended the Town's responsiveness to inquiries and requests for information.
- ✦ **EDSP Action 8:** A comprehensive landowner's survey which engaged 33 landowners within Innisfil Heights Employment Area is now complete. A new land inventory has been developed as a result and more than 1,000 acres of vacant and/or underutilized industrial land have been identified. Through this work an implementation plan consisting of 19 recommended action plans was developed and work has been initiated on several key recommendations.

### Goal #2: Support for an innovation-enabled economy

2024 Progress on Goal #2:

- ✦ **EDSP Action 20:** A comprehensive review of the DMZ Innisfil Program was undertaken, and a new five-year partnership agreement has been negotiated (pending approval of 2025/2026 budget).
- ✦ **EDSP Action 21:** A new marketing plan was implemented in 2024, along with a new pitch deck to better attract new investment leads.
- ✦ **EDSP Action 22:** New and inclusive programming was developed to support diversity, equity and inclusion across all programming. Diversity is considered in all project briefs prior to initiating work to ensure all events and venues are welcoming, inclusive and representative of the Innisfil business community. DMZ Innisfil featured a women-led founder panel at the Collision Conference in Toronto, and has promoted DMZ's women founder and Black founder programming, encouraging DMZ Innisfil members to take part. Town staff took part in the County of Simcoe Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) welcome video and local Week of Welcome event to support newcomers in integrating into the local community and workforce.
- ✦ **EDSP Action 23:** The team successfully applied for and achieved \$285,000 in grant funding to diversify revenue generation for economic development activities. A new sponsorship prospectus was developed and launched this fall to attract private revenue sources to offset the costs of workshops and events which resulted in approximately \$2,250 of new sponsorship funding.
- ✦ **EDSP Action 24:** Approximately 21 events were either hosted, supported or sponsored by the Economic Development team, which resulted in approximately 1,285 attendees receiving educational programming and business support.
- ✦ **EDSP Action 25:** DMZ Innisfil participants secured \$6.6 million in external funding this year, for a cumulative total of \$31.3 million since program inception.
- ✦ **EDSP Actions 26 and 27:** The Economic Development team fostered existing partnerships and created new partnerships in 2024. Lakehead University hosted a new South Simcoe Innovation Week in Innisfil, consisting of three events which supported 74 entrepreneurs, and engaged 27 post-secondary students in an innovation challenge. Over the past year the team further collaborated with partners by facilitating 518 referrals to business support organizations across the region.





### Goal #3: Further a cohesive community by leveraging tourism and culture

#### 2024 Progress on Goal #3:

◆ **EDSP Action 38 and 42:** Staff have secured an RTO7 Grant for \$10k to undertake a tourism asset inventory, which will also support the creation of a new Innisfil Tourism Network. As a municipal contribution is required for this project, the initiative is dependent upon the outcome

of the 2025/2026 budget process.

◆ The addition of tourism sector-specific activities is contingent upon additional resources and budget which is being considered through the 2025/2026 budget process.

### Goal #4: Enhance community amenities and assets

#### 2024 Progress on Goal #4:

◆ **EDSP Actions 5, 15, 48:** Staff have undertaken benchmarking to prepare for the development of a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) in 2025 (pending 2025/2026 budget approval).

◆ **EDSP Action 50:** A new business success story campaign was launched to highlight the successes of local businesses while also demonstrating business support programs and partners. A total of 7 stories were authored and published through print and video format, through which 18 businesses were featured.

◆ **EDSP Action 52:** A new Shop Innisfil campaign was developed to encourage shopping at local businesses and highlighted 35 local businesses, 8 community venues and 7 community organizations. The campaign included a promotional video, marketing collateral and launch event at Fresh Air Flicks. The Shop Innisfil commercial was promoted through the Economic Development social channels and was also shown at Cineplex theaters in Barrie, resulting in 113,585 impressions on social media, and 54,334 page engagements.

### Goal #5: Foster a best-in-class economic development office

#### 2024 Progress on Goal #5:

◆ **EDSP Action 56:** Economic Development staff solidified Innisfil's reputation as a leader in innovation and collaboration by taking part in or leading approximately 10 knowledge sharing opportunities. This includes, but is not limited to, presentations at regional conferences, presentations to local realtors' associations and guest lectures at regional post-secondary institutions.

◆ **EDSP Action 57:** A new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system was onboarded through which new investment inquiries pipelines have been established, more than 3,480 stakeholders have been added, and through which the team has established contacts with more than 788 companies.

◆ **EDSP Action 59:** 3 Council tours took place, and 12 monthly staff tours of local businesses took place. These business visits include a business survey component to understand which issues are important to local stakeholders, assess our performance and identify customized business support opportunities.

◆ **EDSP Action 60:** Staff employed a number of new marketing techniques in an effort to increase awareness and generate new leads. This resulted in a total economic development brand reach of approximately 725k touchpoints, more than double the 2023 reach. As a result of this reach, there were 14,154 visits to the Innisfil Economic Development website, and there are now 2,714 subscribers to the Economic Development newsletter which is issued monthly.



## Fostering a Vibrant Business Community

The Innisfil Economic Development team is committed to fostering a vibrant and innovative business community within the town. A number of factors influence the economic health of a community, including workforce development, talent attraction, planning processes and policies, entrepreneurial support, and more. Alongside a regional ecosystem of entrepreneurial and business support partners, each with their own mandates and areas of expertise, the Innisfil Economic Development team works to ensure that local businesses have access to a robust network of mentors and advisors.

### Who Do We Support?

The Economic Development portfolio supports **four key audiences:**

1. Startups (including entrepreneurs and those considering a transition to entrepreneurship); and
2. Existing businesses (including small business owners, home-based business owners, sole proprietors, and major employers); and
3. Prospective businesses (including investors, developers, site selectors and external business owners seeking opportunities to open/expand in Innisfil); and
4. Prospective residents and community members (including potential new residents, employees or students).

### Getting you the help you need:

Innisfil Economic Development facilitated

**518** referrals to business support partners.



Over the past year, the Town has continued fostering partnerships with a number of partners, including, but not limited to;

- ◆ The County of Simcoe Economic Development Office
- ◆ The City of Barrie, City of Orillia, and Municipal Economic Development offices throughout the County of Simcoe
- ◆ Georgian College and Lakehead University
- ◆ Toronto Metropolitan University and DMZ
- ◆ Nottawasaga Futures
- ◆ Innisfil ideaLAB & Library
- ◆ Agilec
- ◆ Futurpreneur
- ◆ Business Network International (BNI)
- ◆ County of Simcoe Local Immigration Partnership
- ◆ Regional incubator, accelerator and innovation offices

The following are a sample of the many events and initiatives Innisfil Economic Development has hosted, sponsored or supported in collaboration with partner agencies:

- ◆ DMZ Panel, Collision Conference
- ◆ DMZ Innisfil Showcase
- ◆ Various DMZ Innisfil All Access Workshops
- ◆ Agilec Spring Job Fair
- ◆ Nottawasaga Futures Business Coaching & Consulting Program
- ◆ Innisfil Emerging Entrepreneurs Event
- ◆ Innisfil Business Showcase
- ◆ Mayor's Business Breakfast
- ◆ Lakehead University South Simcoe Innovation Week events
- ◆ And so many more!

### The Innisfil Economic Development Team

hosted,  
co-hosted, or  
sponsored

a total of 21 events  
with a total of 1,285 attendees.



## Business Retention & Expansion

The Economic Development team continues to foster and develop meaningful relationships with community stakeholders to ensure the retention of existing businesses and facilitate the growth of expanding industries.

### Mayor's Business Breakfast

The annual Mayor's Breakfast at Friday Harbour Resort brought together more than 119 community stakeholders representing 51 businesses and organizations across a range of sectors. Mayor Dollin provided a keynote address with a focus on Innisfil's economy, and the many efforts Council are leading to support this. Royal Bank Economist, Carrie Freestone, was on hand to provide an economic outlook taking into account macro-economic factors including the global geopolitical climate, anticipated impacts of the recent US election and explained where the region was well-positioned to leverage positive economic trends.

### Innisfil Business Showcase

The Economic Development team hosted the annual Innisfil Business Showcase event once again this year at the Innisfil ideaLAB & Library. The purpose of this event is to celebrate the local business community and showcase the regional business support resources available to the community. The event featured an evening of networking, educational workshops, and a vendor fair of regional business support partners.

### Shop Innisfil Marketing Campaign

The Economic Development team initiated a new "Shop Innisfil" program to encourage the support of local businesses. In 2024 a marketing campaign, consisting of a new webpage, commercial and community screening was launched. The 2024 campaign highlighted 35 local businesses, 8 community venues and 7 community organizations. The Shop Local Innisfil commercial resulted in 113,585 impressions on social media and 54,334 page engagements. Marketing related to the "Shop Innisfil" program will continue into 2025.

Watch the 2024 Shop Local campaign video at [innisfil.ca/ShopLocal](https://innisfil.ca/ShopLocal).

### Week of Welcome

Innisfil Economic Development staff shared insights with local newcomers at the Innisfil ideaLAB & Library Week of Welcome event. This event was a part of the County of Simcoe's second annual Week of Welcome and served as an opportunity for newcomers and long-standing residents to connect with local resources.

### Grand Openings and Events

The Economic Development team has continued to support the grand openings of many local new businesses. Gathering with the Mayor and Council, the team works to ensure we are there for these new businesses, providing them with support and resources. This past year, our team had the opportunity to attend 11 grand openings and look forward to attending many more throughout the future.

### Council Business Tours

The Economic Development team continued to provide the Mayor and Council with business tours throughout Innisfil. As the Town looks to take a more active role in supporting the local tourism industry, this year's business tours focused on local restaurants, marinas and event venues with tours taking place at Gilford Local Eatery, Kon Tiki Marina and Three Feathers. During these tours, the Mayor and Council were able to better understand economic challenges, trends, and potential opportunities facing the Innisfil business community.



### Business Coaching and Consulting

The Innisfil Economic Development team has partnered with Nottawasaga Futures to establish the Innisfil Business Mentorship Program. The program features 14 mentors that provide support in areas including bookkeeping, accounting, legal, website development, marketing, and more. This program provides on-demand mentorship support to entrepreneurs and business owners in our community to allow for business growth and development. This past year, the Economic Development team has provided 249 Innisfil businesses with 42 hours of mentorship.












### Business Site Visits

The Innisfil Economic Development team has been working hard to form meaningful relationships with existing businesses to further understand their current economic struggles, where they see room for opportunities, why they enjoy doing business in Innisfil, and more. One way the team works towards understanding this further is through hands-on learning and business site visits. This year our team has conducted 15 business site visits, and we look forward to growing this number throughout the next year.



## Success by the Numbers

### KPI & Business Development

|  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p><b>179</b></p> <p>New Business and Investment Leads</p>  | <p><b>417</b></p> <p>Jobs Supported Through DMZ Innisfil</p>  | <p><b>1,534</b></p> <p>Businesses Supported Through Economic Development Programming and Events</p>  | <p><b>58</b></p> <p>Business Support Consultations</p>           |
| <p><b>15</b></p> <p>Business Site Visits</p>              | <p><b>11</b></p> <p>Grand Openings Attended</p>             | <p><b>14</b></p> <p>Published Media Stories</p>    | <p><b>518</b></p> <p>Referrals Made to Ecosystem Partners</p>  |
| <p><b>544</b></p> <p>Hours of Mentorship Provided</p>     | <p><b>14</b></p> <p>Innisfil Member Events Hosted</p>       | <p><b>21</b></p> <p>Events Hosted, Co-Hosted, or Sponsored</p>                                     | <p><b>1,285</b></p> <p>Event Attendees</p>                     |



## Business Creation

### DMZ Innisfil

The DMZ Innisfil program, delivered by the Town of Innisfil Economic Development team in partnership with Toronto Metropolitan University, is an accelerator program designed to help founders start and scale their business.

DMZ Innisfil supports Innisfil and Simcoe County area entrepreneurs by providing customized programming through a variety of means including one-to-one mentorship, access to a network of experts and investors, and educational workshops and events through the DMZ Innisfil All Access series.

Located on the second floor of 8000 Yonge Street in Stroud, the DMZ Innisfil provides access to free coworking and meeting space for members, an onsite resource library and is home to monthly Coffee & Coworking events for members and alumni.

- ◆ 417 Jobs were supported through DMZ Innisfil in 2024.
- ◆ 544 Hours of mentorship support was provided in 2024.
- ◆ 14 DMZ Innisfil member events were hosted in 2024.

**Learn More About DMZ Innisfil**

Visit [innisfil.ca/DMZ](https://innisfil.ca/DMZ)



### Innisfil Emerging Entrepreneurs

This year, the Innisfil Economic Development team hosted the Emerging Entrepreneurs event which aimed to gather individuals interested in starting a business, taking their side-hustle to the next level, or generally learning more about entrepreneurship and the resources available within the community. The event was hosted at the Innisfil ideaLAB & Library and featured an evening of networking, presentations from five curated speakers on various topics, and light refreshments.

### Lakehead University South Simcoe Innovation Week

This spring the Innisfil Economic Development Team paired up with Lakehead University to host the South Simcoe Innovation Week. The week included three events: the ICE (Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship) Challenge at Nantyr Shores Secondary School, an Adaptive Leadership and Design Thinking workshop, and a Business Model Canvas workshop, all of which gave entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs expert advice to dig deeper into their business ideas.



## Supporting Corporate Priorities Which Impact Economic Growth

### Innisfil Heights Investment Readiness Update

The Innisfil Heights Employment Area is a cornerstone of Innisfil's economic strategy, featuring over 1,600 acres of land along Highway 400, poised for industrial, commercial, and tourism development. This prime location provides businesses with easy access to major transportation corridors and proximity to the Greater Toronto Area. Expected to generate over 16,000 jobs across various sectors, including manufacturing and logistics, Innisfil Heights presents significant opportunities for expansion. The Town is committed to investing in the necessary infrastructure to support seamless operations and attract both local and international investors.

Over the past two years, the Economic Development team has developed and is implementing a new Innisfil Heights Investment Readiness project designed to better prepare these lands for investment by identifying potential development barriers, and working with Town partners, InnPower and InnServices, and other agencies to proactively address these. A component of this strategy, the Innisfil Heights Action Plan, includes 19 strategic actions to enhance investment readiness in the Innisfil Heights Employment Area, aiming to attract investment, generate jobs, and accelerate economic growth. Proposed action items include:

- ◆ **Community Improvement Plan (CIP):** The ongoing development of targeted CIPs aims to attract high-value investments in key sectors and support industrial and mixed-use development.

- ◆ **Community Permit Planning System (CPPS):** Streamlines development approvals to support faster and more efficient project launches.

- ◆ **Master Drainage Study:** Provides comprehensive drainage solutions, ensuring sustainable and effective stormwater management for new developments.

- ◆ **Accelerated Approvals:** Exploring opportunities to streamline approval processes with external agencies to reduce hurdles and expedite project timelines.

By the first quarter of 2025, the Innisfil Economic Development team will release the Innisfil Heights Investment Guide, a comprehensive resource for investors and developers looking to explore the opportunities, growth potential, and support available in this key area. The team is committed to driving investment, supporting businesses, and fostering sustainable growth. Our mission is to attract and retain strategic investments that align with the Town's priorities, ensuring Innisfil remains a premier destination for businesses to establish, expand, and thrive.

**Sign up for the Economic Development Newsletter to be among the first to know when the Innisfil Heights Investment Guide is released.**



Scan the QR Code to Sign Up!  
[innisfil.ca/EcDevNews](https://innisfil.ca/EcDevNews)

# Marketing Innisfil

Innisfil Economic Development's marketing and promotional efforts aim to market the town as an ideal place to live, work, and do business. Over the past year, the team has taken significant strides in marketing Innisfil by leveraging digital platforms, launching new initiatives, and creating compelling content to attract attention and interest.



## Recent Marketing Highlights

### Monthly Economic Development Newsletter

The Innisfil Economic Development team publishes a monthly Economic Development Newsletter to inform the business community about upcoming news, events, and funding opportunities. This newsletter is packed with up-to-date information to aid in business development and innovation.

**Have you signed up to receive the Town of Innisfil Economic Development Newsletter?**

Sign up today!



**Do you know a local business who has made a notable contribution to the Innisfil economy and should be considered for a future Innisfil Business Spotlight success story?**

Fill out our submission form today.

## Featured Success Stories

### Agricultural opportunities are 'blooming' in Innisfil

Innisfil farmers are cultivating new and innovative ways to grow both their crops and their businesses to keep pace with changes in the agricultural sector. The Innisfil Economic Development team interviewed Laura's Farm Stand and Bradbury Small Family Farm to learn more about the opportunities they've seen for their businesses in the agritourism sector.

Visit [innisfil.ca/AgriculturalOpportunitiesareBlooming](https://innisfil.ca/AgriculturalOpportunitiesareBlooming) to learn more.

### 9 Round Innisfil

The regional economic development eco-system was able to help 9 Round Innisfil transform challenges into opportunities. With targeted business support and resources from Nottawasaga Futures, 9 Round was able to find funding for their business and open a thriving new gym within the community. Together, we're building a stronger local economy!



Watch the 9 Round Success Story [innisfil.ca/SuccessStories](https://innisfil.ca/SuccessStories)



## Looking Ahead

The Economic Development team has made significant progress on both foundational economic development priorities as well as the Economic Development Strategic Plan. Progress on the Economic Development Strategic Plan is ahead of schedule as more than half of the recommended action items are either complete or in-progress. Both quantitative and qualitative feedback suggests that the Town's economic development programming is relevant to business owners and entrepreneurs, is having a positive impact on business retention, expansion and attraction, and is providing inclusive access to a variety of business sizes and sectors.

**In addition to foundational economic development work, key initiatives planned for 2025 (pending 2025/2026 budget approval) include;**

- Development of a new Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to incentivize commercial and industrial development;
- Creation of a new tourism portfolio which will include a new logo and brand, tourism website, tourism asset inventory and network;
- Publication of a new Innisfil Heights Investment Guide highlighting opportunities for development;
- A proactive investment attraction campaign which will include attendance at industry-led conferences and trade shows;
- Introduction of a new DMZ Ambassador program to facilitate new leads and promotion;
- Additional "Shop Innisfil" promotions and support for existing businesses.



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