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**Subject:** Workforce Development Initiative

**Report to:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**Report date:** Wednesday, March 20, 2019

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## **Recommendations**

That Report ED 3-2019 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## **Key Facts**

- Meeting current and future talent, professional, skilled trades and labour needs is a major theme identified in the Economic Development Strategy.
- Finding a solution to current workforce challenges in Niagara will require employers, education and government to work together collaboratively.
- Successful models and best practices in other communities will be researched and current workforce development initiatives in Niagara will be included as a basis for an initial stakeholder meeting.

## **Financial Considerations**

There are no financial implications.

## **Analysis**

Access to a talented, professional, skilled, and educated workforce is increasingly a top concern for businesses and essential to ensure the continued growth of the regional economy. The proximity of Niagara to significant national and global economic drivers makes the region both attractive to new investment as well as new opportunities to build, attract, and retain a talented and skilled workforce within Niagara.

Correspondingly, the existing job skills gap is not isolated to Niagara, but affecting communities across Canada.

This challenge has been raised, not only by local businesses looking to recruit new workers, but also companies looking to expand into Niagara. Finding a solution to this issue will require efforts and action from all levels of government, educational stakeholders, and employers themselves. Niagara Region Economic Development will work with local partners to create a solution or solutions that address the challenges directly related to Niagara's workforce. Additionally, developments in other jurisdictions have shown the importance of ensuring that the local workforce has the on-going training and professional development not only for today's jobs but for the jobs of the future.

As a first step, Niagara Economic Development will facilitate a forum for all stakeholders to identify the major issues and discuss a strategy or strategies to address them. Amongst the questions to be answered initially will be who will lead the initiative and where will the funding come from for the programming? Stakeholders will include Niagara Region, Brock University, Niagara College, Niagara businesses, Niagara Industrial Association, Niagara Workforce Planning Board, Innovate Niagara, Niagara District School Board, Niagara Catholic District School Board, local Economic Development Offices, Unions, Chambers of Commerce as well as others.

These workforce challenges are not unique to Niagara and so models that have been successful in other communities and best practices will be researched by the stakeholder group to inform a solution for Niagara. This research will include the RETAINs model outlined by Councillor Darte at the last PEDC meeting. Regional Talent and Innovation Networks (RETAINs) is a model developed in the U.S. by Edward Gordon, President, Imperial Consultants, Chicago.

A RETAIN acts as a broad non-profit intermediary, linking businesses, educational institutions, unions, government agencies, and relevant non-profit groups. It acts as a catalyst to create a significantly updated talent pipeline for a 21st-century workforce. In the short-term a RETAIN establishes a new system that rapidly fills vacant jobs through better coordinating job training efforts across its partnership network. It also raises the productivity of current workers by initiating on-going employee reskilling. In the long term, a RETAIN updates local educational programs to better prepare more students and the current workforce for the rapidly changing job and career requirements of a high-tech economy. RETAINs focus on talent development through a wide array of innovative programs. They are financed in the U.S. by private and public funds including business investment, foundation grants and local, state and federal funding initiatives.

Work will begin in March to bring the stakeholder group together for an initial meeting and updates will be provided to PEDC on the progress achieved.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

None applicable.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Economic development activities described in this report directly support three of Council Strategic Priorities:

- Fostering innovation, investment and entrepreneurship
- Building a labour-ready workforce
- Positioning Niagara globally

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## **Other Pertinent Reports**

ED 2-2019 Economic Development Strategy 2019-2024

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*This report was reviewed by Valerie Kuhns, Acting Director, Economic Development.*