

June 12, 2023

Re: Council Deputation for Corporate Strategic Plan and Business Licensing

Good evening, Mayor Pellegrini and Members of Council,

Thank you for the opportunity for the King Chamber of Commerce to speak regarding the staff report ADM-CAO-2023-005, the 2023-2026 Corporate Strategic Plan.

On behalf of the Board and membership of the King Chamber of Commerce, I would like to offer our congratulations to Council and Staff on the development of the Strategic Plan. The focus on setting priorities, objectives, clear, measurable results and a proactive approach to communicating progress, is a strong framework to move the township forward into the future. We recognize that this is only the second Strategic Plan the Township has adopted, and this represents a significant improvement in keeping collective efforts aligned towards common goals.

In particular, we would like to congratulate the staff and Council for adopting an approach that prioritizes data-driven, data-informed decision making as part of the focus on Service Excellence. We were thrilled to see the Council's commitment to releasing four open data sets. This will further expand the nature and degree of community engagement, and we strongly support this direction of Council.

We were also pleased to see a priority set on the Customer Experience (CX) as part of a culture of change. We heartily endorse this, and encourage Council to ensure that this CX approach is applied also in transactions and interactions between staff and businesses. We further encourage the development, reporting and publication of metrics on timelines for various permit applications and development proposals, so that a true Open for Business Culture is embedded in municipal processes.

Turning now to the Council priority of Complete Communities, this is an area in which the King Chamber of Commerce closely aligns with the municipality, as per our Position Paper dated earlier this year. Complete communities, which allow for a healthy balance between commercial, residential and community developments, are key to a sustainable future.

Two issues in particular were highlighted among the objectives that we wish to comment on.

The first, is the objective of exploring opportunities for commercial licensing and if approved, implementing programs by 2026. In general, the King Chamber is supportive of such an initiative, as a potential mechanism for levelling the playing field and bringing all businesses into compliance. The manner in which such a program is implemented will be critical if it is to be successful.

- 1) We strongly urge Council not to take any current resources from Economic Development in order to pursue this initiative. There are key priorities to realize King's growth plan, and it is important not to take our collective "eye off the ball", if you will. We would encourage staff, during their program assessment phase, to include the cost of additional staff resources to implement the program, thereby preserving the scarce resources to support commercial growth.
- 2) As we have previously shared, local businesses were hard hit by the pandemic, and are swimming upstream in terms of economic recovery. Inflation, high interest rates, labour shortages and an uncertain economic environment continue to pose challenges for our local businesses. Therefore, it is crucial for a strong outreach and communications plan to be incorporated as part of the program, and to provide at least one year's notice in

advance of a new framework being adopted. This will allow businesses to incorporate increased costs into their business model and budgets. Further, there needs to be a differentiation made between new businesses and existing businesses, and we would strongly urge Council to ensure that there is a sufficient transition time for existing businesses to adapt to the new framework. The Chamber stands ready to assist the Township staff in outreach and engagement on this issue.

- 3) It is imperative that Council consider, as part of this initiative, ensuring that there is sufficient commercial land and facilities available for these businesses to move into, particularly those currently based in residences. The municipality needs to invest in assembling shovel-ready employment lands, so that impacted home-based businesses have a place to move to. As stated in previous positions papers, we encourage Council and the Township to adopt a streamlined approach to prioritizing non-residential development proposals, and taking an “all hands on deck” approach to streamlining the municipal review and approval processes to expedite the commercial projects. As this relates to the proposed tax increase, having commercial properties available for business is imperative, also given the potential rezoning of the properties for Alpa Lumber Mills and Robert B. Somerville. This not only impacts businesses, but can help spread the burden of tax increases for residents-alike.

While the Chamber is generally in support of examining the feasibility of commercial licensing, we wish to underscore for the Township, the critical importance of engagement, communication, transition planning and potential supports or programs for businesses that may have difficulty adapting to the new framework.

The second issue highlighted in the Corporate Strategic Plan is the Blue Box Transition by 2025. We are aware that the Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority (RPR), under provincial legislation, has the responsibility of ensuring transition of the blue box collection services to producer organizations. A fee-setting methodology has been approved by the RPR, which will have impacts on the business community going forward. We are also aware that King Township is scheduled for transition by December 31, 2025. This will be two years after the first transitions occur, and there will be many opportunities to gather lessons learned and best practices from other communities as they move through transition before King Township does.

The King Chamber of Commerce, as a member of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, will be working with the OCC to track the developments on this program, and to develop communications, outreach and programs to support businesses through the transition.

On both of these issues, the King Chamber of Commerce stands ready to collaborate with the Township to engage with member businesses and to help shape impactful and effective programs that creates an optimal environment for businesses to thrive.

Mayor Pellegrini and Members of Council, thank you for the opportunity to share the viewpoints of the business community with you regarding the Corporate Strategic Plan, and hope that our input will helpful as Township staff move forward with pursuing the objectives of the plan. We sincerely appreciate your time and attention, and look forward to working together with the Township on these issues.