

Delegation to Italy intended to strengthen business ties, Sister City links

By Riley Murphy

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At Council's June 3 General Committee meeting, Amanda St. John, Manager of Business Attraction & Investment, presented a memorandum regarding an update on Business Attraction & Investment Division plans and objectives to support the upcoming Town of Caledon Trade Delegation and Sister City Exchange to Italy.

The Town is expanding on its existing Sister City partnership with Isola del Liri, Italy, through a formal trade delegation from June 18 to 24 in Italy to explore 'mutual opportunities' in the agrifood and food processing industries.

The Sister City Agreement is committed to continued and ongoing initiatives to advance culture, tourism, economic development, and educational collaboration.

A delegation report will be presented to the Council in September.

The report will include a detailed overview of prequalified meeting discussions and outcomes, with an assessment of the level of opportunity represented through continued foreign direct investment activity in Italy.

'Our relationship with Italy goes beyond cultural exchange?it's an opportunity to connect with businesses that share our values and sector strengths,' said Mayor Annette Groves in a media release. 'This delegation is about showcasing Caledon as a competitive, welcoming destination for investment while strengthening our sister-city bonds.'

The delegation is supported by the Government of Canada's CanExport Community Investments Program, the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service team and the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Ontario Canada (ICCO).

\$18,600 will be coming from CanExport, the bulk of which will go towards consulting fees.

The consultant's role is to develop all aspects of the in-market program, from planning to evaluation.

St. John said they do the leg work in market by meeting with companies, providing business cases, and setting up meetings with businesses interested in expanding into Canada and Caledon.

Their role also contributes to the post-delegation analysis, and consultants will provide recommendations on whether they should continue efforts in this delegation.

The total cost of the trip with travel and delegation expenses comes to \$68,000. CanExport's funding of \$18,600 brings the Town commitment to \$49,000.

These funds will come from the Business Attraction and Investment Division's existing marketing budget.

The individual travel expenses are being charged back to their respective division.

St. John shared, from their perspective, they are getting a lot of value in terms of marketing and utilizing that portion of the budget for this initiative.

'We have developed a strong relationship with the trade commissioners office and the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Ontario.

Now we have these representatives who have our value proposition, and they are doing this marketing for us in market and even around Ontario," said St. John. "Now the federal government knows that we are out in market promoting investment opportunities."

St. John also shared that there are no anticipated additional costs for taxpayers.

Regarding measuring the delegation's success, St. John shared that increasing their return on investment was a huge priority for them with this delegation.

"We've really worked to expand beyond the successes that have been achieved with the sister city agreement to date," said St. John.

She said that they relied on research from Global Affairs Canada and their guidance to help develop a strategic focus for this mission, which helped them identify agrifood and food and beverage processing as targets beyond tourism and cultural development activities.

Caledon and Italy have shared opportunities and advantages in this respect, with proven success in Caledon with food and beverage companies.

"It's a real opportunity for us, we have green space, we have talent, our strategic location makes us competitive in that area," said St. John.

Regarding return on investment, St. John said that it typically takes about four years for a new company considering a relocation to invest internationally. Because of this, they have developed short and medium-term goals to help measure success.

For the short term, they are looking at opportunities for Caledon businesses to partner with Italian-based companies and strengthen that tie as we are "facing changing trade relationships with the United States," said St. John.

"With the Humber River Centre and the Town's new partnership with DMZ, there is an opportunity to attract entrepreneurs to Caledon as a landing spot," she added.

She said that they are focused on job creation for their medium-term goals and big priority.

They hope to meet with companies that have expressed an interest in constructing a facility in Canada and will pitch Caledon as an option.

St. John added that another significant part of this is economic diversification.

"We've seen a lot of development in Caledon on the logistics front and while that's great we're also looking to bring in other sectors that have a natural advantage that creates high quality jobs for residents," she said. "We have a packed agenda of meetings, we're looking to come out of this with 40 contacts and bringing those back and nurturing relationships along their investment pipeline so we can hopefully land some of those investments for Caledon."