



# Introducing: The Durham Region Innovation District

## **Get ready world: The Durham Region Innovation District is going to change the game.**

The Durham Region has a long history of economic growth, innovation, and recovery. In good times, the region has experienced periods of strong economic expansion based on forward-thinking ideas. Any regional economic downturns have been fought using the same set of progressive principles—incremental growth based on innovation and modernization.

Durham Region and its residents have demonstrated time and time again that they have the ability to proactively demonstrate leadership to evolve the economic landscape before economic disruption occurs—and that's why this is the perfect time to introduce the Durham Region Innovation District.

The concept for the establishment of an Innovation Hub in the Durham Region is three years in the making. In May 2016, a group of thought leaders from the region known as the Idea Summit Cabinet came together with a shared vision—to establish the Durham Region as a world-leading centre of entrepreneurship and innovation. That concept has evolved into the Durham Region Innovation District.

The group is composed of the region's largest and most innovative employers—large and small companies, academia, and government agencies, including: Durham College, Spark Centre, University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT), Lakeridge Health, 360insights, Ontario Power Generation (OPG), AECOM, the

Regional Municipality of Durham Region, Durham Workforce Authority and the City of Oshawa.

Extensive community engagement has taken place with over 200 individuals and organizations participating over the past three years to shape this concept. In March 2018, the group engaged Stiletto (a consulting firm specializing in community clustering and economic development strategies, including research and technology parks and innovation hubs) to undertake a feasibility and assessment exercise, followed by concept refinement and execution support. Market demand suggests there is a need and a gap and industry has expressed interest in participating at a variety of levels for this initiative. The group is now ready to launch the

*Continued on [next page](#)*



initiative and is in the process of working with all levels of government to secure the support needed to bring it from concept to reality.

#### **What is the Durham Region Innovation District?**

The **Durham Regional Innovation District** (the “District”) is a technology-led, innovation-anchored, economic development strategy, with a programmatic approach to re-imagining and re-positioning the Durham Region as an innovation leader. The District will encompass the geographic region of the Durham Region and Northumberland, and will act as a nucleus of innovation to connect the Eastern GTA to the entire Eastern Ontario innovation community.

The District will include the **Innovation Station**, a 60,000 square foot physical location offering centralized services, and a network of four in-market, niche sector-focused accelerators across the region: an **Advanced Technology Accelerator**, a **Nuclear Energy Innovation Accelerator**, an **Advanced**

**Logistics Accelerator**, and an **Agri-Food Technology Accelerator**. The District will be connected to a national and international network of partners forming a virtual global network of innovators—the D-Hive Network.

#### **What does all this mean for you and your fellow HR professionals?**

There are several opportunities for the local workforce and HR professionals. We need your help to map out training programs and work closely with academic partners for curriculum development to meet the expected market and industry demands.

**Four primary sectors of focus will be promoted in the region.** The vision for the District includes a focus on advanced technologies, nuclear energy operations and decommissioning, advanced logistics, and agri-food technologies. Other sectors may materialize over time based on industry and market demand.

**High-value, high-tech jobs.** The ongoing shift toward a global village, and the increasing automation and digitisation of many traditional industries (as

well as the rise of new sectors and industries) are driving the need for—and competition for—highly-qualified, niche sector-trained talent. Several academic programs from post-secondary institutions will work to support this growth, but the District will also encourage talent attraction from outside the region.

**Job retraining opportunities.** The region has adjusted to historical changes in industry by retraining workers and by exploring new ways of growing its economy. Workers expected to be affected by the shift of traditional to emerging industries in the local market can be retrained to participate in the new regional economy.

#### **In Summary**

It’s an opportunity of a generation to redefine the overall economic landscape. It will attract new investments and new businesses to the region and provide meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities for all residents—young and experienced, trained and retrained.

**For further information, please contact us at Spark Centre:** Sherry Colbourne, President & CEO  
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*Sherry Colbourne is a Canadian entrepreneur with decades of experience in Ontario’s high-tech sector. Her career has taken her to the far corners of the world in pursuit of building strategic business relationships*

*for the companies she has served. As CEO of Spark Centre, Sherry guides the direction and growth of Durham’s Regional Innovation Centre and advocates for an international approach to the development of Durham Region’s entrepreneurial ecosystem. Sherry is a strong believer that entrepreneurship brings diverse cultures and people together, and that the opportunity for Durham Region lies in its roots as an innovative and diverse Region.*