

Staff Report



To	General Committee
Subject	Barrie Regional Technology Development Site Opportunity Update
Date	August 13, 2025
Ward	All
From	S. Schlichter, Director of Economic and Creative Development
Executive Member Approval	B. Araniyasundaran, P. ENG., PMP, General Manager of Infrastructure and Growth Management
CAO Approval	M. Prowse, Chief Administrative Officer
Staff Report #	ECD006-25

Recommendation(s):

1. That the City of Barrie serve as partner to an application, led by the County of Simcoe, for the establishment of a Regional Technology Development Site (RTDS) under the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network (OVIN), with the following funding commitments, terms and conditions:
 - a) A \$60,000 per annum cash contribution over a 4-year funding period (\$240,000 in total)
 - b) In-kind contribution of staff time and program overhead support equivalent to \$30,000 per annum over a 4-year period (\$120,000 in total) to support program delivery and business development for the RTDS utilizing existing staff resources.
 - c) Where appropriate, explore access to use city infrastructure/assets to support RTDS pilot projects, and associated departmental approvals.
 - d) Proportionate to population and fiscal contribution, the County of Simcoe will work on a best-efforts basis to ensure Barrie receives equitable benefit from the project relative to its investment, including:
 - i. 30% of programming to be hosted in Barrie (Sandbox Centre, Georgian College Barrie site as examples).

- ii. A proportionate percentage of the targeted companies/entrepreneurs to be served are Barrie-based companies and/ or entrepreneurs.
 - e) The City of Barrie receive recognition in all marketing, media, public announcements, and stakeholder engagements.
 - f) Recognition proportionally in the RTDS naming convention to ensure the total geographic scope of contributing partners are highlighted i.e. Regional Technology Development Site of Simcoe County, Barrie and Orillia.
 - g) As a contributing fiscal partner, the City of Barrie will be included in investment opportunities with an equal opportunity to participate in site selection and lead generation activities.
2. That \$60,000 be added to the Economic and Creative Development operating budget in 2025, 2026, 2027, and 2028 to support the total contribution of \$240,000, to be funded by the Reinvestment Reserve, supporting the creation of a Regional Technology Development Site.
3. That should the application be successful, the City Clerk be authorized to execute any agreements and any ancillary documents that may be required, with Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network, the County of Simcoe, the City of Orillia, Georgian College, Lakehead University, and other organizations for the purposes of delivering the support programs described in the Regional Technology Development Site proposal, subject to the satisfaction of the Director of Legal Services and Director of Economic and Creative Development.

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this Report **is to follow-up from Staff Report ECD005-25 with findings and financial contribution considerations around the creation of a Regional Technology Development Site located with Barrie and the greater region** after further discussions with local stakeholders.

Key Findings:

Staff report ECD005-25 and corresponding Council Motion 25-G-169 directed the Economic and Creative Development Department to pursue discussions with the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network and key stakeholders to pursue a Regional Technology Development Site (RTDS) that would serve Barrie. That staff in Economic and Creative Development report back with findings, including financial and in-kind funding considerations.

The Regional Technology Development Sites, run through the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network, support SMEs to develop, test and prototype their advanced automotive technologies and smart mobility solutions, and tap into specific advice, expertise and

knowledge around key focus areas for the sector.

Specifically, an RTDS enables physical sites across the regions that bring together post-secondary institutions, regional innovation centers, incubators/ accelerators, municipal and regional resources, industry and other regional collaborators to support SMEs in the development, testing, prototyping, validation and commercialization of automotive technology and smart mobility solutions.

The goal of an RTDS is to act as a concierge service to guide clients to the appropriate program or contact, while also building out a set of niche programming that the RTDS runs in house or in partnership with another entity.

The success of the RTDS has led OVIN to solicit proposals from partners to expand the program across the province.

A gap in service delivery exists through the Central Ontario region. Invest Barrie Staff have been in discussions with the County of Simcoe and City of Orillia as well as local post-secondary institutes Georgian College and Lakehead University, to develop a proposal for a joint application for the creation of the Regional Technology Development Site of Simcoe County, Barrie and Orillia.

The County of Simcoe have indicated an interest in being the lead application, with Barrie and Orillia as project and funding partners, both in-kind and cash, and post-secondary institutions serving as in-kind partners and supporting securing industry investment.

As lead, the County of Simcoe will be responsible for leading and administering the application and associated human resource, administrative and reporting components, in addition to serving their respective member municipalities in accessing programming. Positioning the County of Simcoe as the program lead for the RTDS allows for coordinated administration and inclusion across County municipalities while allowing Barrie and Orillia to focus on supporting the initiative and company engagement within its boundaries while ensuring urban priorities, infrastructure assets, and innovation clusters are represented in decision-making and program design.

Barrie and Orillia cash contributions have been calculated proportionately to population and would support the County in program delivery. The in-kind contributions would be dedicated time of existing departmental staff to support company engagement to participate in RTDS programming and to be able to receive new leads and deliver projects to strengthen the automotive sector.

The proposed funding structure through the RTDS program through OVIN is a 1/3, 1/3, 1/3, with each third representing, OVIN, municipal contribution, and industry contribution. As such, the funding request proposed through this application is \$1.2M.

Post-secondary institutions play a foundational role in the RTDS network, often acting as site hosts or core delivery partners. They contribute significant in-kind resources such as specialized research infrastructure, faculty expertise, student talent, and access to labs and equipment, critical assets that not only enable applied R&D and pilot projects, but also reduce the cost and risk for industry partners. These institutions also facilitate

commercialization, talent development, and IP support, helping startups and SMEs scale more effectively.

The creation of a new RTDS would provide opportunities to leverage the new Lakehead University STEM Hub and the newly announced Centre of Industrial Simulation and Prototyping at Georgian College.

By investing in the RTDS, the City of Barrie is directly supporting the growth of local companies, attracting high-value investment, and creating high-quality jobs tied to electric, connected, and autonomous vehicle technologies. This initiative will serve as a hub for innovation, collaboration, and commercialization, drawing industry leaders, researchers, and startups to the region.

Financial Implications:

As part of the partnership with the County of Simcoe and OVIN, the City of Barrie will be required to provide cash and in-kind contributions to the creation and management of the Regional Technology Development Site of Simcoe County, Barrie and Orillia.

The Economic & Creative Development Department is **requesting that \$60,000 be added to the operating budget in 2025, 2026, 2027, and 2028 for a total contribution of \$240,000, to be funded from the Reinvestment Reserve, supporting the creation of a Regional Technology Development Site.**

In-kind support equivalent to \$30,000 per year (\$120,000 total) will be utilize existing staff resources within Economic and Creative Development. Specifically, support will be to provide business development activities to surface Barrie companies, to serve as the primary point of contact for all companies located within Barrie and maintain direct engagement with these businesses throughout the project. Additional staff support will also include supporting program delivery in Barrie and marketing and promoting the RTDS and associated programs and events to Barrie companies. Staffing support will come from the following roles:

1. Senior Business Innovation & Strategic Partnerships Officer & Business Development Officers (80% estimated)
2. Economic & Creative Development Management Team (15% estimated)
3. Communications Team (5% estimated)

If the funding application is approved as proposed, OVIN contribution will be \$1.2 million in funding to support the RTDS of Simcoe County, Barrie and Orillia. These funds demonstrate further leverage of funding from senior levels of government and will be used to build capacity and strengthen the innovation agenda in Barrie and the greater region. Further Industry contributions valued at least \$1.2 million will be leveraged to match the OVIN funds making the overall value of this initiative more than \$3.5 million.

Alternatives:

The following alternative is available for consideration by General Committee:

Alternative #1 – General Committee could choose not to be a Foundation Partner of the Regional Technology Development Site of Barrie, Simcoe County and Orillia and therefore hold back both cash and in-kind contributions. This alternative is not recommended as it would represent a missed strategic opportunity for the City of Barrie. The RTDS is a provincially supported initiative designed to accelerate innovation, commercialization, and industry-academic collaboration, which are core drivers of economic competitiveness. As a Foundation Partner, the City of Barrie would secure a position as part of the program delivery team during critical phases of planning and execution, ensuring the needs of Barrie businesses are reflected and that our municipality can help shape the strategic direction of our automotive and supporting sectors.

Supporting the County of Simcoe through a partnered application reinforces alignment on economic development strategy for the area, which significantly strengthens the competitiveness of the overall program submission. A joint commitment, through both cash and in-kind contributions, positions the City of Barrie as an engaged and proactive partner in a high-impact innovation initiative.

In-kind and financial support are not only proportionate to the anticipated outcomes, but are essential to reinforcing our ongoing commitment to business attraction, scale-up support, and sector diversification. Desired outcomes include the growth of city-based SMEs through applied research collaborations, enhanced commercialization of locally developed technologies, expanded co-op and internship opportunities for youth, and a stronger pipeline of investment-ready companies. In the longer term, the presence of an RTDS can catalyse the development of a broader innovation cluster, supporting land development and attracting private investment.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Affordable Place to Live	X	• Open for business environment to help encourage job creation • Develop and attract talent to support our employers
Community Safety		
Thriving Community	X	• Create and foster programs and opportunities to support community wellness
Infrastructure Investments		
Responsible Governance		

Funds will be used to cover administrative costs, fund partners, secure lab and equipment access and update infrastructure to facilitate testing, prototyping and commercialization activities. Funds will also support innovation pilot projects through regional departments and community partners. The County of Simcoe will be hiring a dedicated resource to administer this program.

Additional Background Information and Analysis:

The specific program offerings are under development with key stakeholders and will be finalized for the application submission as municipal commitments are confirmed.

Fundamentally, an RTDS carries out the following activities:

- Provide access to specialized equipment, hardware and software that will reduce the barriers to innovation for start-ups and SMEs in the automotive and mobility sector, including those developing electric vehicle and battery-related technologies
- Provide business and/or technical advisory services to start-ups and SMEs to assist in the commercialization of technologies developed at the regional sites
- Support regional testing and piloting of technologies and solutions that will lead to adoption and deployment
- Each regional site focuses on a unique aspect of the automotive and smart mobility sector, such as hardware, security, data analytics and more.

Leading or partnering on a RTDS allows municipalities the following benefits:

- Grant funding to run programming or cover administrative costs associated with managing the RTDS
- Leads directly from OVIN for potential new companies or founders looking to explore Barrie as a landing spot
- Access to the RTDS network across the province to collaborate on a client's journey
- Monthly community meetups and events

As funding partner, the City of Barrie will maintain a direct seat at the table in the development of a new RTDS. The RTDS model is designed to support innovation-driven economic growth, attract investment, and accelerate commercialization for local businesses. City involvement ensures urban priorities, infrastructure assets, and innovation clusters are represented in decision-making and program design, aligning the RTDS with local economic development strategies and maximizing benefits for city-based employers, startups, and talent.

The return on the City's investment will be seen through increased business attraction, a more resilient and future-ready economy, enhanced talent development, and a stronger profile in provincial, national and international innovation ecosystems. In doing so, the City of Barrie not only accelerates its economic development goals but also ensures it has a prominent role in the future of Ontario's transportation and technology landscape.

Consultation and Engagement:

There was no public consultation required in relation to this Report.

Engagement with the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network (OVIN), County of Simcoe, City of Orillia, Lakehead University and Georgian College has been completed as part of developing a program proposal.

Key industry, the Sandbox Centre, Chamber of Commerce and other entrepreneurial ecosystem partners will be included as part of the development of a full funding application.

Environmental and Climate Change Impact Matters:

There are no environmental and/or climate change impact matters related to the recommendation.

Report Author:

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