For Immediate Release
Monday, Sep. 8, 2008

Downtown Kitchener digital media centre receives $5 million federal grant

KITCHENER - The rapidly growing realm of digital media was put front and centre by the finance and corporate services committee today, as the group allocated $500,000 from the city's economic development investment fund (EDIF) to be put toward specialized equipment and technical resources to operate a digital media hub in downtown Kitchener.

The committee also endorsed a grant application to the federal Centres of Excellence for Commercialization and Research program -- put forth by the city's industry leaders, Communitech and the University of Waterloo (UW) -- requesting funding support for the development of the local hub, as well as one in Stratford.

"Digital media is something everyone experiences, uses or develops," said Kitchener Mayor Carl Zehr. "By locating in an urban environment, people from the creative community can interact with software developers, entrepreneurs and other specialists to drive innovation that would not be possible if such a facility were isolated in a laboratory setting. A downtown location will help integrate people with research, commercial and artistic interests to create new opportunities."

The Kitchener hub is planned to offer the latest visualization hardware and software, technical and business start-up services (i.e. mentors and venture capital services), and studio/office space for innovators in their start-up or pre-start-up phase.

Essentially, anyone who is interested in digital media and has a creative or innovative idea that they want to pursue will be able use the facility and get access to the technical resources available there.

Together, the two institutes plan to link Canada's digital media clusters from coast to coast - creating a digital convergence corridor and enabling collaboration between researchers, implementers and entrepreneurs.

Kitchener city council has identified the city's approved strategy around a digital media incubator as a top priority for the Kitchener Economic Development Strategy 2007-2010.

The strategy clearly outlines the need to provide a magnet for talent, specifically in authentic urban environments available in downtown Kitchener.

Council recognized the significant opportunities a centre of this kind would offer in the fields driven by digital media including medical imaging and pharmaceutical modeling, manufacturing (virtual prototyping), architecture, cinema, game technologies, digital art and environmental modeling, to name only a few of the areas of economic impact.

The natural fit with biotechnology and life-science visualization further promotes opportunities in biotechnology clusters, particularly with the proximity of UW's Health Sciences campus in downtown Kitchener.

The city's economic development staff first gathered the digital media

working group in 2005 to explore new business opportunities through events connecting small independent developers, large corporate technology companies, researchers, academics and digital artists.

The most consistent recommendation from this group was the need for a digital sandbox - a place where best technologies could be made available to new business in a supportive, multi-disciplinary setting, and where innovators could commercialize ideas, creating jobs and strengthening the local economy.

"Existing digital media firms - such as Christie Digital, whose headquarters are right here in Kitchener, and Open Text -- have demonstrated global leadership in development in this technology and have been successfully competing on the global stage for the last many years," said Rod Regier, the city's executive director of economic development. "This combination of talent and enterprise will give us a substantial advantage of building a globally competitive digital media cluster in this city."

The $65-million project, which includes both institutes, has already received funding commitment from industrial partners in the Waterloo region, academic institutions, Communitech, the Province of Ontario and the City of Stratford.

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