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Made in Burlington

BEDC report emphasizes essential role manufacturers play in local economy

By Kim Arnott
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While most residents probably don't think of Burlington as a manufacturing community, the truth is that manufacturing remains the city's largest provider of full-time jobs.

There are more than 500 companies in the sector, employing nearly 15,000 people and accounting for more than \$2.29 billion, or 55 per cent of Burlington's economic output.

The statistics come out of a recently-released report from the Burlington Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) entitled *Shaping Things to Come; Next Generation Manufacturing Strategy and Action Plan*.

The report, recently endorsed by Burlington city council, outlines a five-year initiative that aims to strengthen the city's manufacturing employment base and increase productivity and output by 10 to 15 per cent over the next decade.

By helping manufacturers transform their business cultures and practices to become more innovative, customer-focused, collaborative, connected, 'green' and adaptable, the BEDC hopes those companies will thrive in today's global economy.

It also hopes that success for existing local manufacturers will attract new companies to relocate to the city.

"Our goal is to make Burlington a centre of advanced manufacturing excellence that is recognized worldwide for innovation and collaboration," Mayor Cam Jackson said in a press issued by the BEDC.

The strategy is supported by an action plan that consists of 14 projects aimed at supporting local manufacturers. The projects cover everything from organizing workshops to linking local manufacturers into new green energy programs and exploring local opportunities for green energy pilot projects.

They reflect specific needs

expressed by Burlington manufacturers, says BEDC executive director Kyle Benham. "Part of this was very much an active listening exercise."

One project that will be launched this fall will see the BEDC bring together small and medium-sized manufacturing firms to form a co-operative that will allow them to jointly purchase business services.

Smaller manufacturers have expressed concern that they need access to specialized business services in areas like auditing, marketing and human resources but don't need or can't afford full-time staff members, explains Benham.

"We will work closely with the local manufacturers to support their efforts to grow and transform their businesses into the world-class competitors of tomorrow."

Mark Gregory, BEDC chair

The business co-operative vision sees the possibility of several smaller companies sharing the services of an employee or consultant.

Other projects will include creating networking opportunities, working with local educational institutions to develop employee training programs, creating a marketing campaign to highlight the sophistication of today's manufacturing companies and helping companies explore government funding programs and potential export markets.

"BEDC's action plan is a blueprint for new jobs and greater prosperity," said BEDC chair Mark Gregory.

"We will work closely with the local manufacturers to support their efforts to grow and transform their businesses into the world-class competitors of tomorrow"