

# Document 1

## Kanata North Special Economic District Action Plan

### Context

Kanata North Technology Park (“Kanata North”) is a key economic engine for Ottawa, contributing nearly \$18 billion annually to Canada’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and driving innovation and growth across the telecommunications, information technology, defence, aerospace, and biotechnology sectors. As Canada’s largest technology park, Kanata North is home to more than 800 companies and supports employment for approximately 33,000 highly skilled workers.

Kanata North is identified in the City’s [Official Plan](#) as one of Ottawa’s two Special Economic Districts, reflecting its strategic importance in advancing innovation, high-value employment, and global competitiveness. The designation also highlights the importance of enhancing quality of life for those who live, work, learn, and play in Kanata North, while strengthening its ability to attract and retain top talent.

In 2024, Council directed staff to develop an Action Plan to strengthen the district’s long-term growth potential. With support from Bloomberg Associates, a philanthropic consultancy within Bloomberg Philanthropies that advises cities around the world, a Plan has been developed that focuses on three primary objectives:

- Strengthening economic performance and talent attraction
- Improving mobility, infrastructure, and quality of place
- Enabling coordinated public and private investment

The Action Plan aims to reinforce Kanata North’s role as Canada’s leading technology and innovation district by enhancing competitiveness, attracting investment, and sustaining its contribution to Ottawa’s broader economic prosperity. This is particularly important as cities across Canada and globally intensify efforts to position themselves as leading technology hubs. The Plan supports Ottawa’s economic diversification objectives and helps ensure the city remains competitive by retaining and growing existing businesses, while also attracting new investment and talent over the long term.

### Approach

The Action Plan was developed through a combination of research, analysis, and stakeholder engagement, including:

- Evidence-based analysis and review of international best practices. Twelve leading global innovation districts were examined, including Here East (London, U.K.), Research Triangle Park (North Carolina, U.S.), Cortex Innovation District (Missouri, U.S.), Incheon Startup Park (South Korea), and Station F (Paris, France). These case studies highlight the importance of strong governance, strategic infrastructure investment, startup ecosystems, academic partnerships, and coordinated land use, talent, and placemaking strategies in supporting long-term innovation and economic growth.
- Collaboration with key local partners, including the Kanata North Business Association and Invest Ottawa.
- More than thirty interviews with interest holders across industry, academia, and all three levels of government.

The process included assessing Kanata North's competitiveness, growth barriers, and future opportunities, ensuring that the Action Plan is globally informed, locally grounded, and focused on implementation.

## **Key Findings**

While the Kanata North Business Association, Invest Ottawa, and other service providers offer several programs and supports for entrepreneurs and businesses, five key themes have been identified where further focus could enhance the district's long-term competitiveness.

### *Business Development*

Kanata North's growth is constrained by limited local investment, global visibility, and a shortage of anchor firms. The absence of a strong financial ecosystem, relatively few Canadian-headquartered companies, and limited international partnerships reduce the district's future ability to attract investment, scale companies, and access top global talent.

### *Entrepreneurship and Innovation*

While the ecosystem is strong, it is fragmented and limited access to capital has weakened the district's startup pipeline. Though increased over the last several years, limited collaboration between academia, investors, and industry, combined with insufficient space for startups to incubate and grow in the park has constrained the development of a strong innovation and commercialization environment.

### *Branding and Marketing*

Kanata North currently lacks a clear, unified brand and narrative to effectively showcase its strengths to investors, talent, and governments. Inconsistent messaging and limited promotion have reduced the district's visibility and ability to attract global investment and skilled workers.

### *Infrastructure*

Infrastructure restrictions, including fragmented planning, aging systems, limited transportation to and within Kanata North, and anticipated energy capacity constraints, are limiting the district's ability to support sustainable growth. The absence of a coordinated framework to align public and private investments has resulted in piecemeal development and disconnected housing, mobility and energy systems that do not fully meet the needs of the district's growing workforce and businesses.

### *Place and Activation*

Kanata North currently lacks the amenities and programming needed to support a vibrant, mixed-use innovation district. Limited public spaces, events, and coordinated programming result in a district that is largely active only during work hours and lacks a strong sense of place.

Additionally, across all focus areas, interest holders emphasized the need for stronger coordination and alignment among the City, economic development partners, industry, and other levels of government to support long-term economic growth.

## **Vision and Strategic Focus**

The Action Plan is intended to set a clear direction for Kanata North, identify key priorities, and align partners around a shared vision for the district's future:

*Make Kanata North a thriving and inclusive innovation ecosystem that attracts and scales high-impact businesses, while improving lives, strengthening communities and contributing meaningfully to Canada's technological progress, workforce resilience, and regional vitality.*

To achieve this vision, the Action Plan identifies five strategic focus areas, each supported by proposed actions.

## *Business Development*

Targeted business development initiatives, strategic incentives, and coordinated investment support can drive sustained growth and competitiveness. By strengthening Kanata North's value proposition, better promoting its strengths, and offering tailored supports and solutions that meet the needs of target firms and talent, it will attract, retain, and grow high-impact companies and skilled professionals across priority sectors and global markets.

### Proposed Actions:

1. **Grow Canadian anchors:** Encourage Canadian headquarter expansions by offering priority access to resources, research labs, and hiring subsidies.
2. **Develop global market entry support:** Implement a focused business expansion and internationalization strategy to support Kanata North-based businesses to scale into foreign markets.
3. **Attract international talent:** Launch a campaign to attract regional, national, and international graduates and early- and mid-career professionals, connecting them to job opportunities and offering relocation assistance, cultural onboarding, and local resource navigation.

## *Entrepreneurship and Innovation*

Global experience demonstrates that combining tailored support for entrepreneurship and innovation, shared infrastructure, and coordinated investment can transform a region's startup environment. By strengthening, scaling, and connecting support services across startups, corporates, investors, and post-secondary institutions, Kanata North will become a thriving hub for high-growth, innovation-driven businesses.

### Proposed Actions:

1. **Establish an innovation consortium:** Establish an Innovation Consortium linking startups, corporates, and post-secondary institutions to advance research and development, talent, and commercialization in Kanata North, including the creation of living labs and testbeds, and expanding on Area X.O's infrastructure.
2. **Understand and address capital needs:** Improve access to capital and build market connectivity to strengthen Kanata North's competitiveness with neighboring technology hubs.
3. **Expand startup hub offer:** Expand and unify Kanata North's startup infrastructure to create a more attractive and livelier hub for entrepreneurs,

institutions of higher education, and existing entrepreneurial players (i.e., Hub350, L-Spark, Incite, CENGN, and Area X.O, etc.)

4. **Grow secondary school presence:** Scale the STEM-focused School Within Innovative & Future Technologies (SWIFT) Program to strengthen Kanata North's talent pipeline.

### *Infrastructure*

Coordinated infrastructure planning that integrates land use, mobility, energy, and digital systems is critical in supporting business investment, sustainability, and quality of life. By upgrading utility and mobility infrastructure, along with the broader measures identified below, Kanata North will enhance sustainability, resilience, and connectivity, and evolve into a coordinated mixed-use innovation district that drives growth and innovation.

#### Proposed Actions:

1. **Establish a Kanata North liaison position:** Designate a City economic development staff member as a Kanata North liaison, responsible for supporting and coordinating all City interactions within the district.
2. **Develop an Integrated District Plan:** Commission an informal, coordinating framework, building on existing policies and guidelines related to economic development, infrastructure, urban design, and transportation, to better align and sequence planning and investment for greater overall impact. The Plan would consolidate existing and new studies into a unified vision for commercial, retail, housing, and energy infrastructure development across Kanata North, while prioritizing integrated infrastructure planning and strengthening transportation connections to and within the district from key areas across the city. It would also serve as a tool to support partnership development and secure investment from other levels of government, anchored by a clear, shared vision for the district's long-term growth and competitiveness.
3. **Accelerate the Community Planning Permit (CPP) Pilot:** Support the acceleration of CPP implementation to advance a combined and streamlined development process that encourages growth and investment within the district. Ensure the CPP is closely aligned with infrastructure planning and capacity considerations, and leverages early development opportunities while broader, long-term district planning work is underway.

## *Marketing and Branding*

Strategic branding and storytelling can redefine an innovation district's identity, attract investment and talent, and strengthen local pride. By strategically marketing to defined audiences, understanding what they value, how they access information, and how to influence their perceptions, Kanata North's reputation as a leading global and local innovation hub will be strengthened.

Proposed Actions:

1. **Strengthen storytelling and positioning:** Develop a unified narrative and communication platform that clearly showcases Kanata North's innovation strengths, industry leadership, and global competitiveness.
2. **Implement a branding and marketing campaign:** Develop a multi-tiered marketing and communications campaign to raise awareness and elevate Kanata North's profile as a leader in emerging technologies.

## *Place and Activation*

High-quality retail, dining, and entertainment, paired with an engaging public realm, create inviting environments that increase visitation and dwell time. By evolving Kanata North into a lively, connected district with diverse amenities and experiences, its appeal will strengthen as a destination for leading companies, skilled talent, and the broader community.

Proposed Actions:

1. **Upgrade retail offer:** Increase retail and experiential vibrancy by understanding current and future workers' needs and wants, attracting targeted operators, supporting their success, and increasing quality retail space.
2. **Create additional community space:** Strengthen connections among Kanata North employees, tenants, and residents by introducing additional mixed-use community spaces in central locations that complement existing hubs such as Hub350.
3. **Increase activities, events, and Kanata North's sense of place:** Activate the public realm by hosting events and activities and introducing public retail, art, and entertainment amenities that promote interaction, collaboration, and strengthen a sense of community and connectivity across the district.

4. **Establish a Kanata North Programming Council:** Create a programming council of key tenants and community representatives to align events and activations with local needs.

### **Delivery Model**

To support implementation of the Action Plan, staff propose establishing a Steering Committee in 2026 to align partner roles and responsibilities, coordinate early implementation efforts and guide development of a long-term governance and operating model for the district.

The Steering Committee would be co-chaired by the Ward Councillor and the Executive Director of the Kanata North Business Association and would include representatives from Invest Ottawa, other levels of government and industry partners.

Early implementation priorities may include strengthening investment attraction efforts, supporting startups through Hub350 and other innovation spaces, initiating scoping for a district-wide master plan, developing a framework for the implementation of a living lab, and piloting placemaking initiatives.

As the scope and complexity of the Action Plan exceeds the capacity of existing structures and economic development organizations, a new district operating model may be required to serve as the central coordinating body responsible for implementation across business development, innovation, infrastructure planning, marketing and placemaking.

Staff will report back to Council in early 2027 with an update on implementation progress and recommendations regarding a long-term governance structure, operating model, and funding framework necessary to ensure the successful implementation of the Action Plan and support the continued growth and global competitiveness of the Kanata North Special Economic District.