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Town matching businesses with Chinese partners

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

With a well-crafted helping hand from the town, the Markham business sector can now target China.

Markham's economic development committee recommended Tuesday that its economic development department work with partners to develop a program for businesses to capitalize on trade and strategic alliance opportunities with China.

China is not an easy country to enter, senior business development officer Ted Northcott said.

"It's a market with challenges," he said.

However, with China joining the World Trade Organization, the "door is opening to more and more opportunities", he added.

Making a business connection with China has been on the town's agenda for a while. Since delegates travelled there in 2002, the town has hosted delegations from its two key Chinese partners, Zhongguancun Science Park in Beijing and the City of Wuhan.

Memorandums of understanding have been signed with both.

Part of the memorandum with Zhongguancun, which has more than 10,000 businesses in IT, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals and 39 educational institutions, has involved setting up an office in Markham. The satellite office, in a home on Moritz Way near Warden Avenue and Hwy. 7, opened in December.

The town's economic development department is working to find out what products and services the park needs "that the department could, in turn, try and match up with Markham and or other Canadian companies", Mr. Northcott said in a report.

Connections have been made; park representatives have started preliminary discussions with Markham-based Polarbear Energy Inc., Mr. Northcott said.

As well, park representatives are taking part in any seminar the department decides to put on regarding opportunities in China.

"At an appropriate time, the department will also introduce park representatives to York University, Seneca College and the University of Toronto for possible collaboration on research projects," Mr. Northcott said.

Markham has good reason to stay linked to the City of Wuhan, he noted. The city's high-tech development zone is reported to be the second largest intelligence area in China, next to Zhongguancun.

A United Nations report, published in 2002, stated Wuhan was ranked sixth of the 25 most promising cities in China. Meanwhile, American futurist McKinly Conway predicts Wuhan will be one of the top 10 future cities of the world in the 21st century.

Wuhan is focussed on developing optoelectronics, which includes optical devices, laser products and office automation equipment, IT, automotive manufacturing, steel and new materials, bio-engineering and new pharmaceuticals and the environment, Mr. Northcott said.

Mayor Don Cousens hosted a delegation from Wuhan in March and was invited to attend an electronic fair in Wuhan this fall. While in Markham, the delegation met with representatives of Jacques Whitford Environment Ltd., which has done extensive work in China.

To further strengthen ties with China, Mr. Northcott's department plans to introduce Jacques Whitford officials to Jack Tsui of Peak Gardens in Markham. Peak is a residential development company operating Parrot Gardens in Wuhan.

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