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An aerial photograph of Brampton, Ontario, Canada. The image shows a mix of residential and commercial buildings, a large parking lot, and a prominent construction crane in the center. The city is surrounded by lush green trees. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing text.

City of Brampton

OPEN

FOR BUSINESS

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According to Mayor Susan Fennell, Brampton's business success is about three things: location, location, location. Just look at the map. As the largest in-land intermodal terminal, the city is surrounded by four major highways; it's only 15 minutes away from Canada's busiest international airport; and there are thousands of acres of zoned, vacant land just waiting for new enterprise.



AND THAT'S JUST the real estate. Brampton has even more to offer in terms of industries. “We’re actively pursuing manufacturing, life sciences, food and beverage, aerospace and logistics industries,” says Mayor Fennell. “We move quickly when people want to become a part of our employment profile.”

Missing from her list is the automotive sector, which Fennell ensures is still Brampton’s largest employer. Despite the challenges in the auto industry earlier this year, the Chrysler plant has survived unscathed. “It is a state-of-the-art plant with state-of-the-art people,” she adds. “Its reputation is based on skill and productivity; that’s why I’m certain the plant will continue.”

The endurance of Chrysler plant seems to be representative of the rest of the city’s economy. Job losses have not been as prevalent in Brampton as they have elsewhere. “We have been lucky,” Fennell smiles. “We’re either growing fast or medium-fast, but we’re still growing. There are new jobs coming to Brampton and we’re opening or expanding businesses every week. The food and beverage industry, for example, is emerging as one of the largest sectors in Brampton. It’s not uncommon to see companies open branch plants here.”

With seemingly endless growth opportunities, it’s a good thing Brampton has the labour force to fill all that space. The city’s labour force repre-

sents more than 240,000 people. And contrary to opinion that residents just live in this suburb to commute to Toronto, over 50 per cent of that working mass live and work here. With a median age of 33.7 years, that number will only increase into a consistent source of skill and expertise.

But sheer volume isn’t what makes Brampton’s workforce stand out. Rather, the city has earned the reputation for its vibrant multiculturalism. “We speak over 100 languages,” says Mayor Fennell. “For international businesses that want to enter the Canadian marketplace, they can easily locate an expansion to their business from anywhere in the world and feel at home here.”

Voice of the business community

Representing the local business community is the Brampton Board of Trade (BBOT). “Our organization does two things,” says Charles Waud, President of the 1,200-member BBOT, as well as his own company, WaudWare Incorporated. “The first is advocacy and policy. We lobby for the interests of local businesses to various levels of government. The second is membership services; we run a number of events for networking with and educating our members.”

As someone who regularly meets with local business owners of both large and small companies, Waud sees Brampton’s appeal first-hand.

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“There’s a lot going on here,” he says. “Brampton has an open mind for new business and the city is always making itself more attractive for investment.”

Of course, Waud also understands the issues that matter most to Brampton businesses. The first item on his list: Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). “It’s a hot topic right now,” he confirms. “It’s coming out next year and there is a lot of discussion about how it will affect our businesses. While we recognise there will be some challenges, the BBOT supports this new legislation.” For those unfamiliar, the Ontario government has moved to unite federal and provincial sales tax into a single 13 per cent tax, which will begin in July 2010. The BBOT believes eliminating the duplication in tax paperwork will lead to decreased operating costs for all businesses, which will benefit Brampton’s economy in the long term.

Another key issue affecting Brampton businesses is the ‘buy local’ or ‘protectionism’ phenomena. The United States, in particular, is propagating this idea, which negatively affects its Canadian trade partners. Waud sees this issue as a balancing act, as it’s important to support the local economy, as well as encourage foreign businesses to open local offices.

Interestingly, because Brampton has residents from all over the world, international trade

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has maintained relative strength. “We have a large influx of people coming from the Middle East and from the Far East,” explains Waud. “These people have connections to businesses from where they originally lived. We’re seeing

more and more interest in doing business between Canada and that part of the world. And the way the economy is here, we have to look into trading with other countries. We can’t just rely on the United States.”

Construction boom

More businesses moving to Brampton has meant a busier construction industry. “Our industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) building permits are outperforming the residential ones,” beams Mayor Fennell, “and they have been for the last several years. The perception is we build a lot of houses, but businesses are outperforming houses. This is a prime employment landscape.”

Brampton has exceeded \$3 billion in construction permits, which has brought the city some attention. “When you hit that amount, you begin to appear on different radar screens for people who work in national and international trade,” she adds.

Not to forget residential construction altogether, Brampton realises that new businesses means new employees who need places to live. “Companies that are moving or expanding here are the ones that drive the need for residential construction,” Fennell says. “When Loblaws consolidated their operations under one roof and moved their head office to Brampton, they brought over 2000 employees. If every one of

those employees moved here, it would drive demand for five subdivisions. We can accommodate that. We can’t ask people to bring their businesses here and tell them they can’t live here.”

“Live, work, play and pray”

It seems all cards are turning up Brampton. The city doesn’t only provide a home for your company, but it also offers a skilled, diversified and multilingual workforce, a convenient location for transportation, room for growth, and housing for employees to meet all budgets.

“You can live, work, play and pray here, and you can do it all in peace,” Mayor Fennell says proudly. “With globalisation being what it is today, people want to live freely and practice their traditions. That’s a part of who we are, and it translates well in the business world. Our openness to diversity is a significant part of our opportunity on a global stage.” **CBJ**