Virtual Tour Abstract

Link: <https://investinhamilton.ca/virtualtour/>

With the support of the CanExport Community Investments program, Hamilton Economic Development succeeded in creating an innovative virtual tour that leverages state-of-the-art technology to navigate the new reality of conducting foreign direct investment work amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Our stated goal with this project was to pivot the frequently in-person elements of foreign direct investment marketing to a new digital reality. As such, we sought to create a virtual site visit experience that could support Hamilton Economic Development’s business development staff while also demonstrating Hamilton’s unique value propositions as a premier destination for investment. In developing this project amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Hamilton Economic Development targeted this storytelling tool toward investors, site selectors, and business leaders as a means of applying a human touch to digital-only conversations necessitated by travel bans and lockdowns.

Beyond the immediate challenges of COVID-19, and with so much of the daily activity of economic development continuing to happen through remote means, we grew the scope of our project to be one that would allow for both a guided tour – even if it was guided via Zoom – as well as a stand-alone experience that could be experienced at an investor’s leisure.

Using new technologies that were developed to meet the needs of this project, our current virtual tour offers multiple 360 degree panoramic shots of Hamilton via drone photography, internal 360 degree tours of investment locations, integration with Google Maps, multi-language support (key information is currently conveyed in English, French, and Spanish) built in slide-shows, and the capacity for expansion through a back-end editor.

Challenges on the project were generally technical in nature and related to working through COVID-19 restrictions (e.g. ensuring subcontracted photographers had proof of vaccination to enter commercial office spaces and development sites). Moving forward, the identified challenges in this project’s ongoing support include securing translation of key virtual tour assets into Portuguese, Farsi, and Mandarin as to support the City of Hamilton’s current foreign direct investment goals.

Amid the challenges that came with working with drone photography and building a tailor-made tool to host this tool, Hamilton Economic Development also recognized an opportunity to work with our larger site developers to establish a collateral pipeline that could provide 3D photography and rendering of speculative builds for use in this tour. We believe such an approach can replicate the benefits of windshield tours and site visits through a virtual environment.

Our ability to offer virtual familiarization tours, in addition to in-person work, will allow us to meet City-defined goals for equity, diversity, and inclusion – as virtual tours reduce barriers for people with disabilities. Moreover, our virtual tour supports the City-defined goal of working to reduce carbon footprints and move Hamilton toward greener solutions. As such this project was one that was engineered from the outset to promote environmental stewardship while addressing systemic barriers that may prevent individuals with unique mobility needs from participating in site tours.

The tour can be viewed through this page - <https://investinhamilton.ca/virtualtour/>

The password for the tour is Hamilton12345.