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Kudos to Craig for summit effort

THE RECORD

Cambridge Mayor Doug Craig showed considerable initiative in organizing a summit last week in an effort to understand the causes and impacts of the crisis in manufacturing.

He invited business, labour and economists to take part and help politicians understand what needs to be done in the face of the upheaval in the Cambridge economy, where more than a third of workers are in manufacturing and where staggering job losses have taken place over the past two years.

"I think, as a municipality, we need to do as much as possible at a local level," he said recently.

What a refreshing attitude, when so many politicians seem content to simply take potshots at other levels of government.

Craig intends to bring forward an action plan to his council, with suggestions drawn from the summit on what the city can do.

Speakers at the summit took a broad perspective, advising that business and labour work together to address the crisis, and stressing that the municipality will have to support community counselling and health agencies, job training for displaced workers and focus on diversifying the local economy.

While many decision-makers express a certain helplessness at what can be done in the face of seismic shifts in the global economy, Craig exemplified a practical, roll-up-the-sleeves-and-get-on-with-it perspective.

The summit didn't provide a complete road map to the future, of all the answers, but suggestions from the summit will help council clarify its priorities as it moves forward.

As good as all this was, something was missing -- the ideas from other municipalities in Waterloo Region where workers and businesses are also struggling. Craig, in fact, was open to such participation. Other municipal councils in the region would do well to imitate Craig and hold similar exercises aimed at building solutions.

It would be beneficial, too, if everyone came together for a summit on the economic challenges facing the entire region.

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