

York Region Natural Heritage System Workshop
November 1st, 2006
Glenway Country Club
Break-out Session Feedback

The following is a summary of the issues and ideas discussed in the break-out sessions carried out at the York Region Natural Heritage System Workshop at the Glenway Country Club on November 1st, 2006.

The purpose of the workshop was to identify a Natural Heritage System for York Region using the latest information, plans and legislation, and to better integrate the Region's Infrastructure Master Plan process with the protection of the Natural Heritage System.

The Region already has policies in place that protect our Greenlands System. This includes features such as wetlands, ANSI's, and environmentally sensitive areas. Recently, Regional Official Plan Amendment 41 was adopted by Council to bring the Regional Official Plan into conformity with the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

However, additional plans, such as the Greenbelt Plan, and new information, such as the Region's Woodlands Study, need to be included. It is important to update the Region's Natural Heritage System so that it can be used as a basis for the Infrastructure Master Plan Updates that are underway, i.e. Transportation, Water and Wastewater, and Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plans.

The workshop sought advice from key environment, development industry, and government stakeholders around:

- Updating Natural Heritage Systems for York Region, and
- How to better integrate the Natural Heritage System into the Infrastructure Master Planning process.

Natural Heritage Key Ideas

Attached in Appendix 1 are the detailed thoughts/questions/ideas as expressed in the break-out groups on natural heritage.

The following is a staff summary of the key conclusions/directions identified regarding the Regional Natural Heritage System.

- Region needs to update Natural Heritage System.
- Natural Heritage System needs to be understood in terms of features and functions.
- Natural Heritage System needs to be connected within the Region and linked beyond the Region (i.e. Toronto, Peel, Simcoe, Durham).
- System needs to recognize the importance of biodiversity, water systems, and human use (i.e. trails, passive recreation).
- Principles should include: Protecting, Linking, and Restoration.
- Developing sustainable communities is vital to protecting the Natural Heritage System.
- Need indicators of progress and to report back regularly.
- There should be a focus on Natural Heritage restoration in existing urban areas.

- Education on the value of the Natural Heritage System and its economic and quality of life benefits is required.
- Recognize that some site specific loss is inevitable, but loss that occurs should be compensated. Quality of the whole system, as opposed to quantity, is important.
- Broad consultation/collaboration/partnerships are vital.
- Develop the equivalent of a Natural Heritage Master Plan.

Infrastructure Key Ideas

Attached in Appendix 2 are the detailed thoughts/questions/ideas as expressed in the break-out groups on the interaction between York Region's infrastructure and natural heritage.

The following is a staff summary of the key conclusions/discussions identified regarding the interaction between York Region's infrastructure and natural heritage.

- Natural Heritage and Infrastructure planning needs to be better integrated.
- Infrastructure projects should focus on protecting and enhancing Natural Heritage System as an opportunity for net gain.
- First objective should be to avoid Natural Heritage features where possible.
- Master Plan process is key to long range planning and Natural Heritage protection.
- Master Plans should emphasize sustainability and Natural Heritage protection.
- Master Plans should have more status in Environmental Assessment (EA) process.
- Utilize new science/technologies and innovation in design/construction.
- EA process needs to be improved – it has become a regulatory tool and one used to delay development rather than make it better.
- Develop an expedited EA process for transit.
- Strive for the public “input” not “review”.
- Collaboration between stakeholders, experts, and the public.
- Some loss of Natural Heritage will occur with increased growth, but better long term Natural Heritage and Infrastructure plans can result in system wide net gains.
- Plan urban structure and infrastructure for the ultimate York Region.
- Need to adopt infrastructure Best Practices.

Next Steps

York Region has committed to reporting back on the findings of the workshop. These results will be brought forward to Council in early 2007. In 2007, a strategy will be drafted to accommodate the issues and recommendations surrounding the Natural Heritage System and its interaction with Regional Infrastructure.

Stakeholders and workshop participants will be kept informed. If you have any comments or additional suggestions, please forward them to Regional staff at futureyork@york.ca.

Appendix 1 – Natural Heritage Break-out: Detailed Notes

The first break-out session addressed creating a Regional Natural Heritage System. The discussion focused on the following questions:

1. Did we get it right?
2. What do we need to make it work?
 - a. What are the key elements?
 - b. What should receive the most protection?
 - c. What policies or measures will make a Regional system work?
3. What do we need to improve?

Four break-out groups, with the assistance of a facilitator, discussed the issues and generated ideas for a more effective Natural Heritage System in York Region. The following thoughts/questions/ideas are repeated as expressed in the break-out groups. Each break-out group identified a number of “Key Points” or conclusions.

1.1 Group 1 – Facilitator: Sandra Malcic

- Need criteria to differentiate between Regional and Local systems
 - However, be cautious not to create artificial boundaries between systems
- Pressure at local level may result in Natural Heritage losses
- Concern expressed about assigning “level” of significance to features/areas
- Need to resolve “quantity” vs. “quality” of objectives of NH system
- Deciding upon a percent coverage (of the Region) for the Natural Heritage System is essential
- Science is there, implementation is the challenge
- Community values need to be considered & balanced
- Areas to improve:
 - More frequent updates/use of latest science/technologies
 - Natural Heritage features & values within urban areas should connect local systems with the Regional system; focus on the social values of Natural Heritage in urban areas.
- Communities are making good advancements on Natural Heritage and recreation planning
- Need legitimate criteria for sustainable communities (Natural Heritage System, social, economic) at Local and Regional scale.
- Principles (connectivity, etc.) need to be accommodated today so the opportunity is not lost in the future
- Regional work is on the right track – needs stronger policies for local municipalities to implement (lean on).
- Need to establish and protect Natural Heritage Systems (features & functions) and connections within settlement areas. (Better integration with development and infrastructure). Region can fill gap left with Provincial legislation (Greenbelt vs. Growth Plans)
- Access to detailed Natural Heritage features mapping for Greenbelt Natural Heritage System needs to be improved
- Region can make Natural Heritage planning consistent between ORM, Greenbelt area, and settlement/growth areas (Green space & Open space planning).
- Valuing Natural Heritage components within urbanizing context

- Region needs to acknowledge our broader obligations beyond boundaries; global migration, etc.
- Education and communication is essential – among experts and to our communities
- Need all features considered (meadows, etc)
- Collaboration & cooperation is essential

Key Points

- Incorporate valid/legitimate community values and awareness into our planning.
- York Region on right track with Natural Heritage planning, need more emphasis on our broader role (National & Global).
- Better integration of our infrastructure planning with our Natural Heritage planning.

1.2 Group 2 – Facilitator: Laura Atkins-Paul

- Is the goal of a minimum 25% forest coverage for the Region (in OP) still relevant
 - One size fits all?
- Region doesn't currently emphasize water components
- Important watersheds, streams, rivers, and linkages to Terrestrial
- Got right concept of features and function
- "Industry" planning consulting municipalities doesn't know how to determine if tests are being met
- 2 challenges – what's Regional scale & what's Local scale
- What do we do with groundwater?
 - Is it part of Natural Heritage System?
 - What needs to be protected & why?
- If goal is sustainability of Natural Heritage System → not just protect natural areas, in rural and Greenfield areas but also degraded systems in urban areas
- System as Region is presenting also has value for cultural, societal, multi-layers beyond bugs & trees
- What are services that this Natural Heritage System will provide, E.g.)
 - Ecological function
 - Societal needs
- Need a clear articulation of what you want system to provide
- If view Natural Heritage System as separate from other systems – not just an overlay
- How do you link in with trails – are these services off limits
- What areas have the most significance – where are the "No Go Zones"? Is everything important?
- Select best examples of different types of intact ecosystems to protect
- Disagree with above point, this goes back to "islands of green" not systems approach
- Need to look at context of pieces in system
- Need to look at our authority to protect it – implement policies
 - Look to PPS
- New definition in PPS is pretty clear
- What are suites that need to work in concert – context changes throughout Region

- Systems north & south of moraine – more robust system
- There is no one approach that works everywhere
- We'll have to accept loss with increased growth & infrastructure
- The approach of looking at Infrastructure in Natural Heritage will help to avoid future problems
- Significant may mean less easy to replace
- Need an economic evaluation what is the level of financial impact we/landowners are willing to accept
- In TRCA watershed – look at how pieces in system link it & how will be affected if removed
- Model/tool to look at existing and impacts in future – the “so what”
- TRCA terrestrial model can predict impact of changes on system
- Tools to test “what ifs”
 - Test back to OP goals
- Quality vs. Quantity
 - E.g. is a ditch fish habitat?
- Define areas – backbone – the green infrastructure
- When landowner tries to sell, they advertise green infrastructure → its an integral part of community
- Areas that are important are already protected
- Need to ID areas of risk
- Not enough money to do the job – especially when land is identified as developable. E.g. Developable land costs often exceed \$300K/acre
- Bring back to – different ways to design communities – e.g. Community based energy
- The notion that people believe the Natural Heritage System is already protected is worrisome
- Green infrastructure and built infrastructure have same needs
- In existing urban areas, every little green is important
- Coordinate infrastructure – e.g. Yonge Street; e.g. Water sewer roads (not piece meal)
- Region focus on Quality vs. Quantity, so is percent of forest cover that important
- Monitoring & maintenance → Who is responsible? Financially?

Key Points

- What are the most important things in the system – what is valued? What is its priority in the Natural Heritage System Master Plan?
- What is a Regional System?
 - Who does what within system?
 - Roles & responsibilities of agencies
 - Common understanding
 - Common targets, measures, goals
 - Map – Regional & drill down to local level
- Natural Heritage System (ecosystem services) is an integral part of a sustainable community
 - First need the authority to protect it

1.3 Group 3 – Facilitator: Ian Buchanan

- Natural Heritage System identification: Step 1 – implementation & compliance critical
- Penalties & integration with variety of environments
- Penalties for actions must be relevant & must help restore the system
 - E.g. Remove trees in one place, replant in another
- Recognize function of system
 - New info hydrological role & benefits & important Natural Heritage System protects hydro functions
 - Lack of criteria to define system – agencies have different approaches – How do we define?
- Scale understanding & purpose; help with this
- Workshop & consensus
- Being done on Oak Ridges Moraine
- Need more than broad scale “report card” – need to review monitoring
- East-West linkages are often overlooked; need more emphasis
- Look at opportunities
- Infrastructure/physiographic
- Can we measure no net loss? Tighten up
- Hierarchy – protection...no net loss – of tools
- No net loss sounds good but hard to quantify for some functions
- Need to measure at local site and systems scale
- Use indicators or surrogates for assessing impacts
- First define system then protect it
- Verify feature targets
- Ensure south portion gets attention – not just north part of Region
- In some areas functions decrease so need to compensate, strengthen areas core-linkage elsewhere
- Need to understand functions perhaps more than features
 - Ecological, social, cultural
- Economic aspect is key; jobs, money & what is/define role of province/federal government
- York Region advocate input from province & federal
- Define Natural System role to access trade offs
- Need targets, functions & features
- Infrastructure Environmental Assessment/planning often numeric assessment; need more details to inform
- Recognize multiple benefits of feature or system services they provide
- Aurora wildlife park trails integration exp.
- In urban, need to stress keeping green for benefits & environmental and social e.g. stewardship
- Next step ensure that development is sustainable
- Enforcement assistance from all levels: local, regional, provincial
- “Bonusing” tools; incentives are key
- Mitigate & restore – types of habitat are key not just trees
- The Natural Heritage System doesn't end at edge of feature – need supportive policies for sustaining feature
 - Policy support

- Balance society/environment/economy; but not currently level playing field
- Define system first
- “Balance” not the best term

Key Points

- The Natural Heritage System needs to first be identified/defined – then it needs to be protected.
 - Implementation and compliance is critical.
- Penalties must restore the system or be relevant to the offensive actions.
 - E.g. If trees are removed, more trees should be replanted
- Need to recognize the functions of the Natural Heritage System.
 - Perhaps understanding these functions is more important than the features.
- Need to define the Natural Heritage System to access trade offs.
- In urban areas, the environmental, social (etc.) benefits for keeping things green need to be stressed. E.g. Stewardship.
- “Bonusing” tools and incentives are key.

1.4 Group 4 – Facilitator: Paul Bottomley

- Flag/identify agricultural preservation
 - Is it part of Natural Heritage System?
 - If so, what is weakness in Greenbelt plan?
 - Look at agricultural from economics
- Measurement of Natural Heritage System could be improved. Are current indicators the right ones?
- Disconnect between science and policy. Protect large significant areas – identify these key areas and develop policies for them
- Look at complete cycles of Natural Heritage System; hydrological cycle
- Protect recharge function
 - Wetlands/recharge is important
 - How develop rule book to implement policy; water balance/ i.e. infiltration/green roofs etc.
 - Province to develop these tools
- Hydrological system should be included in Natural Heritage System
- Regional definition of local Natural Heritage System
 - What is it?
 - What is level of sustainability we want?
 - How measure it?
- Challenge is how we build southern York – whitebelt/pink areas
 - Too much stripped away for environmental purposes
 - Look at human condition in new areas → schools/hospitals/transit/affordable housing
 - Public policy debate required
 - What is sustainability measure!
- Develop communities not enclaves
- Guidance required in whitebelt/pink areas; guidance is OK in green areas
 - Takes pressure off changing greenbelt
- Focus on remediation in whitebelt/pink areas; i.e. storm water ponds → better ways to do it?

- Infill sites:
 - Policies? fitting into Natural Heritage System
 - Criteria?
 - Storm water ponds?
 - Tool box required – Region/Provincial agencies
- Cycling/walking master plan gap exists
- Is there National/continental Natural Heritage System that should be included?
- Elements for protection
 - Significant feature/functions
 - Community value/ecological, social

Key Points

- The Region is doing a good job.
- A next step is to recognize significant features and develop policies to protect them.
- Monitoring is important, need performance measures to report to the public.
- Define tool kits – how do we intensify without going into the green area.
- Need social marketing and public education on the values of the natural heritage system and understand the values of the features, but not get “bent out of shape” on every tree.

Appendix 2 – Infrastructure Break-out: Detailed Notes

The second break-out session addressed the interaction between Regional Infrastructure and the Regional Natural Heritage System. The discussion focused on the following questions:

1. Do current policies and processes provide adequate direction for infrastructure proposed in the Regional Natural Heritage System?
2. What kind of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Infrastructure should be standard practice within the Regional Natural Heritage System?
3. What implementation measures beyond zoning should the Region explore?
4. What mitigative or restorative measures should be considered?

Four break-out groups, with the assistance of a facilitator, discussed the issues and generated ideas about the interaction between York Region's Infrastructure and Natural Heritage System. The following thoughts/questions/ideas are repeated as expressed in the break-out groups. Each break-out group identified a number of "Key Points" or conclusions.

2.1 Group 1 – Facilitator: Sandra Malcic

- Sensitive design – alternative ways to meet needs – essential to recognize the value of the Natural Heritage System
- Provincial downloading has impacts; York Region should be pressing Province for alternative solutions
- York Region needs to formalize proactive practices into policy
- Growth pressures outside of the Region will affect us – Integrate external pressures
- York Region should be vocal stakeholder in growth matters outside the Region.
- Missing relationship between Natural Heritage System and Infrastructure – What is sustainable? Engineering infrastructure; Define.
- Quality of life in rural roads master planning needs to protect cultural features.
- More meaningful public consultation for infrastructure planning – better pro-active consultation. Input as opposed to review.
- Better articulation of the process for infrastructure planning prior to Environmental Assessments (EA). Role for Master Plans
- Reverse approach of EAs. i.e. "How can this project enhance local environment and social values"
- Good environmental protection and enhancement measures have to be established early then implemented and enforced (potentially incentive based).
- Use positive incentives with contractors rather than penalties – build environment first commitment into tendering process (e.g. Trans Can Pipeline) *need attention to detail
- Doing it right from the beginning is also more cost effective
- Provincial infrastructure is behind and the Region is building redundant roads because of lack of orderly planning
- Need to keep ahead of our transportation planning (i.e. have plan in place prior to the growth)
- Incorporate environmental measures with master plan rather than EAs so the money and foresight is in place.

- Need to stay in front of the game
- The master planning exercise done very thoroughly will make the EA process more effective. Including stakeholders buy-in at the master planning stage
- Include performance measures and monitoring requirements in master planning
- Timing an issue
- Planning authorities need to get back into the drivers seat

Key Points

- More orderly development to reduce redundant infrastructure and involve the province in all aspects of planning (4 R's)
- EA process has become regulatory tool rather than a Planning tool. Master Plans need to do the planning better and get the buy-in at the early stage. Focus project specific EAs to "what can the project do to enhance ecological & social values"
- Region has good practices but we need to formalize them into policy to provide for consistent application

2.2 Group 2 – Facilitator: Laura Atkins-Paul

- "tools"
 - Info up front
 - York Region has improved this but gap between what *is* done in Environmental Assessment (EA) and what *needs* to be done
 - Needs to be clarity of info
- Do the policy & legislative tools do enough?
 - Oak Rides Moraine Conservation Plan, ...
 - Official Plan, Master Plans, ...
- Look at opportunity to use tools for retrofitting existing infrastructure
- Gain should be gain worth having
- EA as tool – what do we want them to achieve? Need EA process that is different.
- Other projects and processes that haven't been connected with surrounding context can negatively impact or pre-empt "doing the right thing" in an EA
- Is there some layer status that MPs can hold that other agencies will agree to adhere to, so not where we grow but how integrate green into MPs
- Pine Valley was shown in MP that no one objected to – development was predicated on it
- Need more comprehensive EA/MP
- What is role of public in making these decisions?
- Best Management Practices – public's role
- Engineering practices are not new?
 - E.g. Use of non-potable water for lawn water, rain harvesting
 - Might mean no Big Pipe
- How do we influence lifestyle changes – decision making
- People will choose cheapest easiest way – provide positive incentives
 - E.g. Widening roads to accommodate HOV lanes
- Explore BMPs that could be used
 - E.g. – sidewalks, bike racks
- What's a BMP approved & what's a sustainable approach?

- We need to have big picture of sustainable principles in our documents and link BMPs in at implementation
- Agreement on above, with provincial/regional/local governments
- Look at new ways to build
- Alternative engineering standards
- Work with actual developers
- EA process is broken – needs to be fixed
- Need to coordinate projects
- MOE needs to be aware of what rest of the Province is doing e.g. Places to Grow
- Toronto is bundling EAs
- EA process is not the only issue, it has been abused by public
- It's how you use EA process that counts; it's a municipal choice how to use as a tool?

Key Points

- EA needs to be used at Master Plan level – would help with coordination of projects
- Bundling EAs
 - At Master Plan level
 - On site level too
- Sustainability principles – in policy documents & Best Management Practices to implement
- Like planning, EAs can be very linear and they don't have to be – Terms of Reference

2.3 Group 3 – Facilitator: Ian Buchanan

- Direction in policies, yes but
 - 1 – gap in implementation (deliveries)
 - 2 – evaluation of alternatives during EA process
 - 3 – design innovation
- Infrastructure improvements are opportunities for net gain and need policies to require it
- Money to support Best Management Practices and implementation
- New approaches recognize early in process
- Integration of Natural Heritage System early in process
- Need to consider restoration & enhancement opportunities
- Funding of infrastructure based on historical funding – what is innovation funded by?
 - E.g. changes to development charges legislation
- Different funding formula & public awareness
- Change legislation
 - Province to encourage/ensure environmental protection & integration
- Pre-consultation to identify alternative strategies
- Infrastructure planning, master planning, strategic planning
- Challenge Natural Heritage System planning & Infrastructure planning
 - Growth planning
- Is planning horizon long enough? 25 years too short; out of step with growth & Natural Heritage System planning

- Get ahead of issues with both green & built infrastructure
- Timing gap; need Province to get out ahead of 'approved growth' view
- Educate public of timing issues & legislative gaps
- Gap with OP timing – 25 years; need longer term plans not future growth 'blanks'
- Public transportation infrastructure support & funding by Province
 - E.g. parking lots
- Long term planning, more detailed population & demographic planning
- Municipalities provide more detailed info to regional municipality to inform plan
- Provide/allow for/encourage innovation, flexibility & options in the future
- Work patterns/lifestyles & habits → change status quo
- Change the marketing for community & infrastructure needs
- Incentives to break cycles & past patterns

Key Points

- There is a direction in policies but there is a gap in the implementation, evaluation of alternatives during the EA process, and design innovation.
- Improvement projects on infrastructure are opportunities for net gain, and policies must be created that require that focus.
- Current funding of infrastructure is based on historical funding – what is funding innovation?
- Need a different funding formula and more public awareness.
- Is the planning horizon long enough? Perhaps 25 years is out of step with growth and Natural Heritage System planning.
- Need to educate the public on timing issues and legislative gaps.

2.4 Group 4 – Facilitator: Paul Bottomley

- 16th/19th Avenue construction indicate policies are insufficient
 - Environmental Assessment (EA) process needs improvement
- Wellhead protection
 - What is the toolkit
 - Regulation not drafted
- Province needs to bring stakeholders together to discuss policy/definitions
- Begin to look at choices for best environmental protection
- Policies for infrastructure in Greenbelt/Rouge required in addition to Oak Ridges Moraine
- Regional/Local governance/policy gap exists
- Policy framework for Private infrastructure required
- Why EA process for transit? Exempt transit.
- Continue to pursue 4Rs
- Region great job/ but filtered down to local level
- Existing development problems need fixing
- Long term plan for Region is fabulous
 - Communicating to public is a challenge
- Full price recovery does not exist for Natural Heritage System; budget required
- Should we plan for ultimate population for infrastructure
 - i.e. 2 million +
- Need to be more innovative
 - incentives required for change

- work with industry, i.e. Roof top storage/green
- Lack of information exists on Best Management Practices. Need to develop Best Practices
- Road construction/run off/improvements/salt loads
- Need to include social impacts of road system
- Pedestrian/cycling component → Best Management Practices.
- Lake Simcoe/Lake Ontario link
- Expand Greening Strategy to sustainability agricultural strategy
 - Stewardship at agricultural level as well as greening

Key Points

- The EA act/process needs to be refined – especially in cases of better known practices, like transit
- Region needs to remain proactive
- There needs to be continued involvement and engagement of the public
- All levels of government, Conservation Authorities, etc. need to be involved in addressing gaps in existing policies and funding mechanisms
- Region should look beyond its boundaries and collaborate with the surrounding regions to ensure their policies and plans do not adversely affect the Region.