

York Region Sustainability Strategy

Towards a Sustainable Region

Preliminary Draft
March, 2007



New Council Photo to be added

Message from York Regional Council

York Regional Council is pleased to present the first *York Region Sustainability Strategy: Towards a Sustainable Region*. The Region of York faces a number of issues including a fast pace of growth, creating and retaining a diversity of employment, protecting and restoring our natural heritage system and providing supportive infrastructure and adequate human services.

These challenges warrant a new and fresh approach to our operations and decision-making processes – a sustainability perspective. This Sustainability Strategy provides a model for municipal decision-making that integrates the values of sustainable natural environment, healthy communities and economic vitality. This model also addresses the way we engage our public, monitor our progress and improve on our successes.

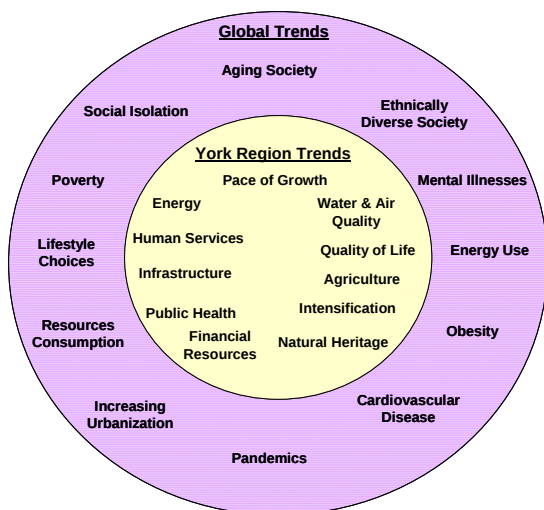
This draft strategy is based on input from our Regional employees, stakeholders and public. Before Regional Council finalizes this strategy, we need your thoughts and concerns. Your input is vital.

Towards a Sustainable Region



Towards a Sustainable Region...

The purpose of the York Region Sustainability Strategy is to provide a long-term framework for making smarter decisions about growth management and municipal responsibilities that better integrate the economy, environment and community. As our population is expected to increase to 1.5 million residents by 2031, the Region will face a number of important issues. These decisions will address how we manage our growth, protect and enhance our natural heritage system and foster a strong economy. In addition, the Region will be affected by global trends related to changing demographics, increasing diversity, energy concerns, social cohesion, the quality of our air, water and soil, and such public health issues as obesity and cardiovascular diseases.



We need to approach these issues from a new and fresh perspective. The Sustainability Strategy is intended to provide an integrated, innovative and long-term view. In this way, we can fully evaluate our decisions and strengthen our environment, economy and communities. To achieve this, the seemingly inconsequential choices of everyday life, as well as our important long-term decisions require a different level of awareness.

Sustainability: Living Better, Not Living Without

*Treat the earth well: It was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children.
We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our Children*
– **Ancient Aboriginal Proverb.**

World Region	Share of World Private Consumption Expenditures	Share of the World Population
United States and Canada	31.5	5.2
Western Europe	28.7	6.4
East Asia and Pacific	21.4	32.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	6.7	8.5
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	3.3	7.9
South Asia	2	22.4
Australia and New Zealand	1.5	0.4
Middle East and North Africa	1.4	4.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.2	10.9

SOURCE: "State of the World 2004" The World Watch Institute, 2004, Washington D.C.

Fifty-years ago, our world was a different place and it will be vastly different fifty-years in the future. During this time, technological advances, political shifts, climate change, immigration, demand for human services and affordable housing, and higher energy costs, will require society to adopt a different economic, social and environmental value system. We must work together to find innovative and creative ways to live our lives within the Earth's limits using our ingenuity. **Sustainability is about living better, not living without** – this is the legacy of sustainability that the Region is committed to.



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Did you know...

The average Canadian will, in his/her lifetime:

- use 120,000,000 litres of water
- consume the equivalent of 600,000 cubic metres of natural gas, 1,100,000 kg coal or 575,000 litres of crude oil
- travel 700,000 km in motor vehicles which is equivalent to traveling around the world at the equator 17.5 times; and,
- generate 40,000 kg of garbage.

SOURCE: *Sustainability within a Generation*, 2004

Background

The concept of sustainability is rooted in the pursuit of environmental protection and social justice. During the 1960s and 1970s, the typical approach to economic prosperity was to maximize profit and optimize performance without regard to environmental impacts or social costs.

By the 1980s, there was an international awareness that this approach to economic development was responsible for: loss of biodiversity, natural resource depletion, pollution and, in some cases, social inequity and a reduction in a quality of life. As a result, a new paradigm of growth and development was created through the notion of sustainability.



In 1987, the United Nations Commission on the Environment and Development produced the *Brundtland Commission Report* that defined sustainable development as ***“development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”***

What Does Sustainability Mean?

Sustainability means living within the Earth's Limits. It means living in a world where feeding people does not necessitate polluting groundwater and coastal shorelines. Where transporting people and goods does not mean polluting our air and changing our climate. Where heating our homes and powering our industries does not require vast amounts of polluting fossil fuels. Sustainability means doing things better – not doing without

- **David Suzuki, Foreword to *Sustainability Within a Generation*, 2004**



Sustainability means leaving our communities, our Region, our World in a healthy state for our children and grandchildren.

Sustainability means evaluating the community, environmental and economic effects of our actions.

Sustainability means thinking differently, being more innovative and collaborative.



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Sustainability means making smarter decisions about our lifestyle, community design, infrastructure and financial decisions.

Why a Sustainability Strategy?

- Makes good business sense in terms of increasing our competitive advantage for the future, energizing our employees, increasing efficiency and productivity.
- Translates the concept of sustainability into practical action.
- Provides a useful model for smarter decision-making that integrates economic, environmental and community considerations.
- Aligns and coordinates current sustainability initiatives, and identifies gaps.
- Addresses the expectations and values of our public, stakeholders and employees.
- The Strategy demonstrates leadership.



York Region Successes

The Region has built a strong foundation for sustainability over the years and has established an extensive portfolio of sustainability initiatives that include:

- Vision 2026 with eight integrated goals;
- Regional Official Plan based on the themes of natural environment, economic vitality and healthy communities;
- The Greening Strategy and Land Securement Initiatives;
- The State of the Environment Report 2005;
- Energy and Environmental Management Systems (EEMS);
- Water for Tomorrow Program;
- Energy Efficient Affordable Housing Project: Tom Taylor Place
- Public Transit and Rapid Transit Initiatives (YRT/VIVA);
- Minimum LEED Silver Standard for Regional Facilities;
- Corporate Clean Air Task Force
- York Region Housing Strategy
- Coordinated approach to the ROP and Infrastructure Master Plans Update; and,
- A variety of purchasing and operation decisions (i.e. LED traffic lights, new carpet procurement etc.)



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Local Municipal Initiatives

- Town of Aurora: Water Conservation By-Law;
- The Town of East Gwillimbury: Energy Star Program and LEED Silver Standard for all new Town facilities.
- Town of Georgina: Municipal Waste Reduction Initiatives.
- The Township of King: Outdoor Water Use Initiatives;
- Town of Markham: Green Bin Collection Program, Pathways and Trails Master Plan;
- The Town of Newmarket: Pesticide By-Law prohibiting the use of cosmetic pesticides on public and private property;
- The Town of Richmond Hill: Wind Energy Project, Residential Intensification Study;
- The City of Vaughan: Sustainable Community Project in Block 39;
- The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville: Redevelopment of 19 Civic Avenue – Nineteen on the Park for arts, culture and entertainment;
- ...and many more!

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT:

Vision 2026:

Vision 2026 is an overall blueprint for York Region. It includes a vision statement, eight goals, and action areas within each goal that describe what people have said they want the Region to be. These goals areas include: 1) Quality Communities for a Diverse Population 2) Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture 3) A Vibrant Economy 4) Responding to the Needs of Our Residents 5) Housing Choices for Our Residents 6) Managed and Balanced Growth 7) Infrastructure for a Growing Region and 8) Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region.

York Region Sustainability Strategy:

This strategy builds on the sustainability policy and the sustainability activities that the Region already has in place. The purpose of this strategy is to take the Region to the next level of sustainability. It is recognized that as we aim to strengthen sustainability values throughout the Region, we will have to take additional steps while we continually evaluate our direction and progress.



Sustainability Spotlight:

The Towards Sustainability in York Region Advisory Group

In September 2005, Regional Council endorsed the establishment and workplan of the Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group. The mandate of the Advisory Group was to provide advice to the Region on how to make the Regional Official Plan a more Sustainable plan and how to develop a Sustainable Infrastructure Strategy including next steps.

A Different Way of Thinking

The Region of York has established a strong vision for the future with its two major strategic documents, [Vision 2026](#) and the [Regional Official Plan](#). The Region also has a number of implementation plans and strategies including: The Greening Strategy, Housing Strategy, Infrastructure Master Plans, the Economic Strategy and a Human Services Strategy.

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The York Region Sustainability Strategy calls for a different perspective on **how** we implement Regional initiatives. The Strategy calls for a new way of doing things – new integrated solutions. It will focus on integrating this different approach into all our policies and practices. In this way, the Sustainability Strategy is intended to be an **evolving, living** document.

It provides a leadership framework for updating, implementation and monitoring progress for all Regional sustainability efforts.



Guiding Principles for Implementation

The following principles are designed to promote a different way of thinking towards implementation so that we can make smarter, more integrated choices, and lead by example.

**Think Globally,
Act Locally**

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Principle 1: | Provide a long-term perspective on sustainability. |
| Principle 2: | Evaluate using the triple bottom-line elements of environment, economy and community. |
| Principle 3: | Create a culture of continuous improvement, minimizing impact and maximizing innovation. |
| Principle 4: | Identify specific short-term achievable actions that contribute towards a sustainability legacy. |
| Principle 5: | Set targets, monitor and report progress. |
| Principle 6: | Foster partnerships and public engagement. |
| Principle 7: | Raise the level of sustainability awareness through education, dialogue and reassessment. |
| Principle 8: | Promote sustainable lifestyles and re-evaluation of our consumption and expectations. |

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Action Areas

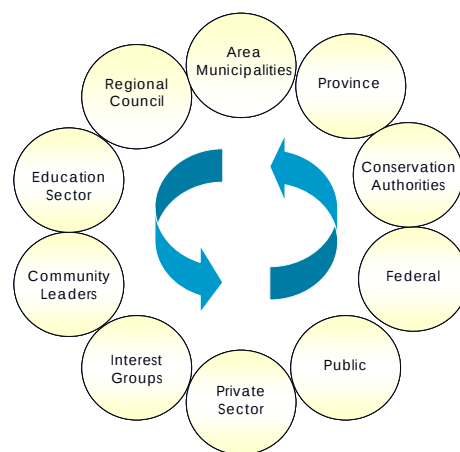
The policies and initiatives of the Sustainability Strategy have been categorized under the following action areas:

- I. Corporate Culture of Sustainability
- II. Healthy Communities
- III. Economic Vitality
- IV. Sustainable Natural Environment
- V. Education, Engagement and Partnerships
- VI. Sustainability Implementation and Monitoring

Strengthening Partnerships to Achieve our Legacy

The issues and actions in this Sustainability Strategy are wide-ranging and have a broad effect across all levels of government in Canada and Internationally.

The framework for the Sustainability Strategy will be carried out in partnership with Regional departments, stakeholders and our public. In this way, the Region has an opportunity to be a leader with its partners in order to capture the Region's unique diversity of values, needs and perspectives.



I. Corporate Culture of Sustainability

The Region understands that sustainability is very much a way of thinking that begins with raising awareness and integrating sustainability principles into all Regional decision-making processes. This approach will assist the Region in optimizing productivity, performance and overall employee well-being.

Actions

- Become a leader in sustainability policy and action in Canada.
- Foster corporate champions of sustainability to provide leadership within the Corporation.
- Initiate a sustainability training program to further engage Senior Management, Regional Council and all levels of staff.
- Include a triple bottom line sustainability assessment in Council Reports on all major decisions.



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- Increase the financial sustainability of the Corporation's budget, business plans and processes.
- Require Regional business units to incorporate sustainability objectives into their business plans
- Prepare a green procurement strategy that ensures that environmentally friendly and biodegradable products are given first priority.
- Prepare a purchase of service protocol which introduces a sustainability criteria.
- Hold seminars for Regional employees on green purchasing and contracting.
- Use electronic distribution of materials wherever possible to reduce paper usage.
- Consider a Third Party Audit of Regional policy, operations and procedures in order to identify the gaps where sustainability considerations may be lacking.
- Recommend that all York Region capital projects consider life-cycle costs which includes maintenance.
- Pursue a Transportation Demand Management Strategy including carpooling, pedestrian and cycling initiatives.
- Promote employee wellness including fitness, stress management and healthy workplace.
- Complete a sustainable fleet strategy for regional vehicles that considers alternative fuels, vehicle types, and operational guidelines.
- Build Regional Buildings at a minimum LEED Silver Standard.
- Consider the possibility of development charge credits and/or bonus servicing allocation for developments that attain LEED certification.
- Continue to increase the energy efficiency and sustainability of the York Region Buildings through retrofits, procurement and conservation measures.



- Reduce emissions of smog precursors (ozone, particulate matter, sulphur dioxide) and harmful pollutants that impact human health.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions in existing and future Regional Facilities and provide reduction targets over time as per our Partners for Climate Protection commitments.
- Consider establishing a Regional Office of Sustainability.

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- Establish a York Region Internship Program that enables New Canadians to gain valuable Canadian work experience in the Corporation either on a volunteer or paid basis.

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT:

Flooring Replacement Project:

York Region recently replaced the flooring in its administrative building with a combination of carpet and rubber flooring. The carpet contains 50 percent recycled content, including 23 percent recycled carpet. In fact, the rubber flooring is made entirely from recycled tires! This product passes strict tests for indoor air quality, meets the LEED rating systems, is 100 percent recyclable, and is more durable and longer-lasting than conventional carpet. The existing carpet was removed and reclaimed guaranteeing that no material would be incinerated or placed in a landfill site.

II. Healthy Communities

Sustainability is about achieving a state of well-being. The Region strives to improve the quality of life and health of our residents and employees and support overall independence and personal development by planning and developing healthy and strong communities.

Our goal is to create self-sustaining and healthy communities that emphasize the human condition. This objective involves an integrated decision-making process that simultaneously considers land-use and infrastructure planning, human services and fiscal impacts.



Actions

- Integrate land-using planning with urban design and infrastructure planning.
- Implement high quality urban design, architecture and place making across the Region.
- Require that all new residential development be compact in nature and incorporate a mix and range of housing options.
- Promote the Region's Transit-Oriented Design Guidelines to provide opportunities to shape urban form that is transit-supportive, mixed-use and efficient, and provides a sense of place to residents and employees.
- Create new communities that prioritize mobility and access so that everyone is entitled to reasonable access to all places, goods and services in the Region. This includes people with physical disabilities, low incomes and the elderly.
- Design new communities in the Region's Whitebelt that prioritize the human condition with respect to health, social equity, culture, environment and sense of place.
- Recognize that culture and heritage are key elements of community, quality of life and health.



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- Continue to investigate innovative and creative strategies to promote intensification and compact development in the Regional Centres and Corridors, including financial and planning tools.
- Prepare a Region-wide Housing Requirements Study based on the 2006 Census and update the Region's Housing Supply Strategy.
- Work with the private sector and public agencies to provide a broad array of housing choices for all income groups.
- Work with the police, area municipalities and other key stakeholders in employing the techniques of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED).
- Prepare and adopt a York Region Pedestrian and Bicycling Master Plan.
- Work with the Conservation Authorities to improve the quality and quantity of storm water through innovative approaches such as permeable surfaces, green roofs and engineering wetlands.
- Continue to support human services planning by advocating for adequate funding for human services infrastructure and to foster civic engagement in building healthy communities.
- Continue to implement the Region's Human Service Strategy to ensure that services match our rapid population growth and that the needs of youth, seniors, new Canadians and low income individuals are met.
- Work with partners through the Inclusivity Action Plan to ensure that the potential of new Canadians is realized.
- Promote 'one stop' community service delivery that is located in the Regional Centres and Corridors in order to provide transportation access options for users.
- Consider how community design and lifestyle is connected to such health issues as obesity, as well as respiratory and cardiovascular disease.
- Promote health awareness and programs such as: walk to school, no smoking awareness, healthy foods and physical activity.
- Hold a Sustainable Greenfield Workshop with an array of Regional stakeholders to explore ideas around environmental protection and development options in the Region's remaining greenfield areas.



- Continue to support "20/20" The Way to Clean Air Program for Schools.
- Continue to construct energy efficient Affordable Housing Projects such as Tom Taylor Place.

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Did you know...

Each hour per day spent in a car increases the likelihood of becoming obese by 6%. In 2001, obesity cost the Canadian Health Care System \$1.6 Billion in hospital care, drugs and doctors and \$2.7 billion in lost earnings due to illness and/or premature death - a total of \$4.3 billion!

III. Economic Vitality

Sustainability will help make York Region more competitive. This approach can result in efficiencies and savings, create attractive, balanced communities, and help attract a talented labour force and leading edge companies. The Region can provide a climate for the growth of innovative and competitive companies that can contribute towards a resilient, diverse and prosperous economy. In short, sustainability makes good business sense.

Actions

- Work with the Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade to promote economic vitality.
- Promote senior level partnerships and investment that support economic development initiatives.
- Improve the understanding of the Regional economy in order to address industry requirements and skills availability.
- Advocate for training and immigration policies that are attuned to the needs of the employer community and provide resources needed to support a new immigrant labour force.
- Promote the economic and environmental benefits of intensification within urban areas.
- Work with the area municipalities to expedite key industrial/commercial developments through the Regional approval process.
- Establish a Sustainable Business Directory of companies that sell sustainable products, purchase environmentally-friendly products, and exercise corporate social responsibility.



- Engage the business community on techniques to reduce water usage and energy consumption.
- Develop and implement a local source food strategy that increases awareness about production, processing and distribution.
- Ensure triple bottom line assessment of all infrastructure initiatives and context sensitive design.



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- Continue to find new and innovative infrastructure construction techniques that result in positive economic, environmental and social impacts.
- Apply Transportation Demand Management to increase transit usage, carpooling and alternative transportation modes.
- Continue to pursue implementation of Phase 2 of the Region's rapid transit project VIVA.
- Update the Region's Water, Wastewater and Transportation Master Plans utilizing sustainability principles.
- Ensure that the movement of goods are safe, efficient and flexible and will minimize the use of non-renewable resources.
- Continue to promote our tourism strengths, including forests, historic villages, parks and artistic and cultural activities through such initiatives as the Premier-Ranked Tourism Destinations.
- Ensure that all new initiatives listed in the Region's business plans include a sustainability assessment.

Did you know...

Solar, photovoltaics, wind turbines, and fuel cells are expected to expand from a current sector value of \$9.5 billion now to \$89 billion by 2012. (State of the World, 2004)

IV. Sustainable Natural Environment

York Region's natural environment is one of our greatest assets. The Greenbelt includes 69% of the Region's land areas. It contributes to the quality of life of our residents and helps attract new business to the Region. Our goal is to not only protect, but to enhance and strengthen our natural heritage.

Actions

- Identify and adopt an updated linked natural heritage system for York Region in collaboration with the stakeholders, area municipalities and conservation authorities.
- Host a Climate Change Symposium in York Region to promote awareness of implications as well as explore mitigation and response strategies.
- Update the Greening Strategy and Land Securement Initiative for York Region based on sustainability values.
- Adopt and implement the Corporate Clean Air Strategy.



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- Investigate and adopt principles for sustainable green communities in order to create more liveable, energy efficient communities with smaller ecological footprints.
- Work to improve the quantity and quality of the Region subsurface and surface water systems including Lake Simcoe.
- Continue to pursue the Energy-from-Waste Incineration Project with Durham Region in order to manage our waste locally.
- Utilize state of the art infrastructure construction techniques to minimize impact on the environment.
- Continue street tree and reforestation programs to increase green cover in the Region.
- Continue to ensure clean and safe drinking water for residents in York Region.
- Increase the Region's waste diversion rate to 65% by 2010 and 75% by 2016.

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

The Greening Strategy

York Region's award winning Greening Strategy was adopted in 2000. Since that time Council has annually funded the Natural Environment Securement Fund, over 580 acres additional have been protected and 500,000 trees and shrubs have been planted between 2000 and 2005

V. Education, Engagement and Partnerships

Many of the elements of sustainability lie outside traditional municipal responsibilities. This is why partnerships with other sectors and organizations is essential to create a common vision and coordinated action.



Actions

- Publish and distribute this Sustainability Strategy inviting input from the public stakeholders and partner input.
- Produce a citizen brochure that describes how York Region residents can contribute to the Region's sustainability goals and actions.
- Promote the social goals of equity, accessibility and engagement so that each of our citizens can lead a healthy, fulfilling and connected life.
- Showcase and promote the York Region Sustainability Strategy and accomplishments at various local, national and international forums.
- Establish a sustainability website which includes regional programs and promotes awareness.

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- Reconstitute the *Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group* to provide partner/stakeholder feedback at various implementation stages.
- Continue to support the York Region Human Services Planning Coalition in its efforts to advocate for adequate and timely investment in human services so that quality of life in York Region is maintained and enhanced.
- Engage businesses, schools, environmental and community groups in an on-going dialogue to improve sustainability planning in York Region.
- Work with area municipalities, conservation authorities and interest groups on initiatives such as climate change, greening and intensification.
- Continue to work together with Provincial and Federal Governments on defining sustainability and putting together an action plan for moving ahead.



- Encourage the Province to make changes to the building code to implement innovative ideas that integrate sustainability principles into development.
- Explore methods to involve the diverse segments of the Region's population.

- Partner with the York Region School Boards to incorporate the concept of sustainability into the curriculum.

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

LED Traffic Signal Program

York Region has completed its Light Emitting Diode (LED) traffic signal replacement program. LEDs consist of a number of small, low voltage lights connected in strings. Should one of the string fail, the other strings continue to maintain the operation of the signal. These lights are superior to incandescent bulbs for longevity, visibility, maintenance and use 90 percent less power. It is anticipated that the LED program will pay for itself in three years.

VI. Sustainability Implementation and Monitoring

The key to a successful sustainability strategy is its implementation, continuous monitoring and improvement. It is important to identify and address the practical requirements for implementing the Regional Sustainability Strategy.

Actions

- Identify timelines and success measures for each of the actions in this strategy.
- Identify qualitative and quantitative indicators of progress in sustainability.



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- Develop a sustainability assessment template for all Regional policies, initiatives, projects and staff reports.
- Benchmark Regional performance on an annual basis against a set of criteria, targets and indicators that define sustainability in York Region.



- Report annually to the public and stakeholders on sustainability initiatives, indicators and issues.
- Continue to use the Energy and Environmental Management System (EEMS) to track energy performance and costs across the Region on an annual basis.

Strategy Timeline and Resources

Draft Strategy	2007				
	March	April	May	June	July
Endorsed for Consultation by Regional Council					
Stakeholder Consultation					
Final Sustainability Strategy for Council Final Approval					
Implementation Begins					

Many of the programs and policies listed in this preliminary draft Sustainability Strategy are already accounted for in existing departmental business plans throughout the Corporation. Those proposed action items that are not presently covered will be subject to

separate business case reports during the implementation phase of the Sustainability Strategy.

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We Need Your Input

This Draft Sustainability Strategy is based on input from the public and stakeholders during the Region's Sustainability Symposium, our Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group and the Growth Management Public Engagement Initiative. This preliminary draft strategy contains some of the hundreds of ideas that we have heard from our public. Before Regional Council finalizes the Strategy, we need your ideas, thoughts and concerns.

To send us your input, please contact York Region at futureyork@york.ca or call 905-895-1231 extension 1570. Alternatively, you can send your comments to our mailing address:

The Regional Municipality of York
Planning and Development Services Department
17250 Yonge Street, 4th Floor
Newmarket, ON L3Y 6Z1



We have made great progress, but there is much left to do. For more information on our sustainability and growth management work, visit our website at www.york.ca and search under "Planning for Tomorrow".

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