

**“Towards a Sustainable Region” Symposium
Kortright Centre, March 3, 2006
Feedback from Break-out Sessions**

The following is a summary of the key themes and action ideas raised in the break-out session at the “Towards a Sustainable Region” Symposium on March 3, 2006 at the Kortright Centre for Conservation.

The break-out session consisted of seven groups with designated themes:

1. Pace of Growth
2. Environment: Natural Heritage, Air and Water
3. Economic Vitality and Job Creation
4. Human Services, Culture and Heritage
5. Energy
6. Infrastructure and Congestion
7. Community for the Future

Despite the variety of break-out themes, some common ideas for Regional action were offered in several groups. These included:

- Strengthening culture and heritage in the Region’s communities;
- Improving the Region’s approach to public engagement;
- Conducting full cost accounting and asset management;
- Adopting a sustainability lens that consists of the quadruple bottom line and increased stakeholder collaboration; and,
- Encouraging the Region to become a national champion of sustainable growth management.

The ideas are organized under a number of themes that were mentioned several times in group discussions. The intent is to capture the ideas raised and report them to Regional Council. Please note that the themes and ideas assembled here are reported as they were heard.

Break out Session #1 – Pace of Growth

Top Three Priorities:

- 1. Examine directing growth elsewhere.***
- 2. Use full cost accounting to influence market behaviour.***
- 3. Improve two way communications between the public and the Region***

Federal and Provincial Government

- Clarify immigration levels with federal and provincial governments

- Identify all existing Federal and Provincial Policies and/or strategies on Growth Management.
- Request that the Province host a summit on growth management.

Public Engagement and Partnerships

- Invest and employ ways to educate the public on all the growth related information
- Educate public on full cost accounting
- Educate the public on intensification and the Provincial 40% target by encouraging debate on what it means
- Empower public during consultations by asking public how can we change, instead of a having a pre-determined discussion
- Use public education to shape market demand toward compact development
- Know and understand the public perceptions on the issues the public is facing related to Growth Management.
- Outreach to segments that would not likely participate in consultations
- Learn how to engage the community
- Engage agencies and public in the Region's growth management strategy
- Have better two-way communication between public and Region.

Regional Policy/Action

- Use policy to direct and accommodate population growth to other urban centres across Canada.
- Put in place tax and other economic benefits to influence market behaviour
- Have an institutional framework in place to assist new immigrants in settling into and maintaining their career and family life.
- Foster local food production and reduce energy consumption in our communities.
- Ensure a range of housing mix that the public will embrace
- Emphasize the relationship between health and development costs using true cost accounting
- Address how cost plays a part in growth by conducting a detailed analysis of costs and benefits
- Provide more opportunities for volunteerism throughout the Region.
- Determine the infrastructure to handle soft and hard needs
- Have a good tax base to foster sustainable growth
- Coin another word for "intensification" as it has bad connotations
- Build housing that is not hidden behind a garage.

Sustainability Lens

- Have a rural perspective to dealing with growth
- Look at hindsight to facilitate future planning – learn from our mistakes
- Have a balance between "wants" and "sustainability"
- Ensure long term preservation of agricultural lands
- Make future local food production (or lack thereof) an issue.
- Become world ambassadors for sustainability planning.

- Instead of always dwelling on the built form results of growth (i.e. sprawl), concentrate more on the human impacts (e.g. obesity, isolation, etc.)

Break out Session #2: Environment: Natural Heritage, Air and Water

Top Three Priorities

- 1. Determine the natural heritage system and carrying capacity of the landscape.***
- 2. Define the value of natural capital and heritage.***
- 3. Plan communities and implement according to the above***

Growth Forecasts and Targets

- Examine Provincial forecasts and others in order to determine if the Region can meet its sustainability goals.
- Determine plan of action if the Region cannot meet these growth forecasts or targets.
- Identify a natural heritage system that is common to both the TRCA and LRSCA

Natural Heritage Asset Management

- Define the natural capital on landscape
- Determine the value of the natural assets
- Determine the economic return of protecting and enhancing the natural heritage system.
- Engage in asset management
- Develop an accounting model that determines the value of the environment to inform the investment and acquisition of additional natural heritage lands.
- Determine the carrying-capacity calculation of the Region
- Live, work and play within the Regional carrying-capacity

Regional and Municipal Community Building

- Focus on development within the building envelope:
 - Building and urban design
 - Protecting smaller natural heritage areas
 - Ensuring land and building requirements for renewable energy and energy efficient technologies.
- Eliminate the generation of pollutants in air, water and land
- Implement a Regional Pesticide By-law with special focus on lawn care
- Have better community design – VIVA is good, but pedestrians need sidewalks!
- Engage in a LEEDS certification program for community design
- Raise awareness of societal behaviour standards
- Protect natural resources using the watershed model
- Secure natural resources not only on the 5% of public land but on the 95% of private land using principles of stewardship
- Protect agricultural industry, not just the land

- Municipalities have to be more responsible for protecting the environment by focusing on settlement areas first.

Public Engagement and Partnerships

- Partner with developers (i.e. Block 39) to educate and raise awareness of a desirable market and benefit of protecting and restoring natural heritage
- Engage in public awareness of the environmental value to the urban community.

Sustainability Lens

- Consider the 2 ways of looking at sustainability through consumption (purchasing) and production (selling)
- Emphasize that the definition of sustainable development equals stewardship
- The 3 elements of sustainability do not have to be perfectly balanced

Break out Session #3: Economic Vitality and Job Creation

Top Three Priorities

1. **Create urban environment to attract skilled labour.**
2. **Create cultural identity/investment.**
3. **Invest in rail, transit, communication infrastructure**

Business Attraction and Retention

- Create urban environment to attract:
 - Skilled labour
 - Diversity in housing, entertainment etc...particularly in the north of the Regional Municipality of York
 - Tourism
 - Culture
- Review Government core business in York Region.
- Work with telecommunication companies to help incoming investment to make sure communication services and infrastructure are available.
- Establish tax incentives that are targeted to business in order to attract business
- Invest and promote rail transit
- Invest and promote broadband infrastructure
- Nurture low cost commuting and invest in infrastructure

Government/ Labour Relations

- Review provincial forecasts and make sure population targets are correct. They may be over-estimated.
- Encourage business to employ immigrants, raise awareness
- Leverage investment with other levels of government
- Create an environment where people can live, work and play

Culture

- York Region could promote its own cultural identity
- Create an identity to attract investment
- Establish a Cultural Advisory Council supported by all area municipalities
- Use culture to attract talent

Partnerships/ Education Awareness

- Better communication between stakeholders
- Promote a change in mind set using education and awareness programs.
- In order to get buy-in, educate residents, politicians and developers

Energy

- Work toward zero sum energy situation that includes:
 - Ownership of energy
 - Accountable consumers
 - Zoning reviews in relation to both the environment, energy
 - Audits/ Retrofits

Break out Session #4: Human Services, Culture and Heritage

Top Three Priorities

1. Use a better mechanism to determine sense of place.
2. Integrate different sectors, skills and people to solve issues.
3. Plan for people not just land use.

Human Services Decision-Making and Approach

- Focus on a blend of shorter term wins and long term strategies when developing strategies
- Use a fuller range of alternate management strategies to encourage and engage public and stakeholder involvement.
- When discussing human services, disaggregate the numbers of units, people, services, targets, etc. to further, or more uniquely, illustrate change and trends.
- To expand housing choices, focus on bringing in all players together and looking at a variety of prices to increase affordability
- Use Vision 2026 as the starting point
- Encourage competition for investment and funding but ensure that funding is base – not just 1 time
- Recognize the importance of integrated planning and people's attitudes and mind-sets to changing the way we do business.
- Do not lose sight of the need to provide quality human services for all people.
- Support Politicians and people who take risks.

- Get away from knee jerk reactions to political risk taking - publicly support political reasonable risk-taking regardless of outcome.
- Shuffle the deck - have a forum of people from a range of different backgrounds to solve some of the issues – use full capacity of community without silos. (HSPC model)
- Build communities within communities - stress the principle of proximity
- Take responsibility to listen, hear and be heard
- Take responsibility and leadership in the decision making process – use the many opportunities for prevention of issues - do not wait until the issues becomes too big (i.e. homelessness)
- Recognize the importance of community involvement in building sense of place
- Encourage people to support amenities to make communities liveable and define how people live.

Culture & Heritage

- Employ a mechanism to create sense of place, community vision and definition.
- Develop a sense of place in Regional communities using a “lens of culture”
- Develop character of community
- Recognize importance of quality of community in addition to numbers
- Identify ways to connect community with structures, infrastructure, institutions (the real Region people live in).
- Refer to Ottawa’s 20/20 – long term vision with drilling down to separate issue areas

Sustainability Lens

- Create a sense of belonging by balancing deficiencies on a “lopsided stool”
- Remember that people want to belong and support human service policies that support this.
- Planning needs to be more than just for land use – plan for people
- Make York Region goal of Towards a “Viable” Region as it is difficult to be sustainable

Break out Session #5: Energy

Top Three Priorities

- 1. Strengthen education and stakeholder dialogue.***
- 2. Develop built form to reduce energy consumption.***
- 3. Region needs to play a leadership role in energy sustainability.***

Public Engagement and Partnerships

- Need regular meetings, sessions, collaboration and communication
- Community groups should be in the room to find solutions
- Consider business opportunities of Green energy across the Region.
- Engage in an information discussion to identify solutions through alternative energy sources (i.e. in Markham, 40 energy alternatives were found).

- Engage in education that is meaningful to the public (e.g. Powerstream monitors in new homes)
- Spend little time discussing automobile use and more on public energy use
 - Reluctance of public to pay for infrastructure to support car use
- Make energy a dominant municipal issues similar to car use and planning

Energy Strategy/ Action Plan

- Determine what the Region's role in energy
- Promote organizational champions
- Organizations need to take a holistic approach to energy, everyone in the organization needs understand the approach and be on the same page
- Determine the Region's energy supply of renewable energy
 - Look to other jurisdictions to determine the energy distribution at the community level
 - Consider new provincial legislation made in recent announcement around incentives for renewable energy
- Note that wind, solar and biogas are small producers of energy
- Begin with implementing simple and cost effective solutions.
- Lead in and champion Meso-scale mapping
 - Best sources of wind power are on the Moraine; the issue becomes the ORMCP
- Consider the impacts of electric Power vs Gas
 - Start thinking about impacts: economic, social, alternative forms of transport and employment should gas prices become four times higher.
- Build facilities at the appropriate scale
- Manage demand vs supply (i.e. block rates)
- Document Regional energy consumption and benchmark with other jurisdictions.
- Provide incentives for alternative energy sources
 - Provincial community based services up to IOMW
 - Fixed price by kW of renewable energy
 - 20 year contracts
 - Buy right access to grid connection
- Promote green roofs since the largest energy consumer is heating and lighting
- Play a leadership role in LEED Silver Buildings

Planning & Development Process

- Car use and planning for its use dominates municipal issues
- Factor in issues energy sources in municipal development approvals
- Simple solutions are possible in the beginning of the process
- Think about energy in the planning process and built form
- Lobby to amend Planning Act and PPS to put energy into planning process
- Energy planning does not mean saying no to development
- Re-think approach to built form – i.e. Highway 7 transition picture - lanes, cross-section picture – two first pictures show tracks not light rail.

- Give people viable options to cars – Centres and Corridors strategy goes partway but development form has to support alternatives to car.
- Put the Environmental Assessment upfront in the planning process rather than planning the financial and technical aspects of supplying power.
- There are no standards for acceptable planning of power supply and facilities in a socially and environmentally responsible way

Break out Session #6: Infrastructure and Congestion

Top Three Priorities

- 1. Lead in better community design. Make intensified and self-sufficient communities.***
- 2. Move from revenue based to quadruple bottom line thinking on transit.***
- 3. York Region has to become a leader on sustainability. “Walk the Talk” and educate on individual choices.***

Transportation and Infrastructure

- Build more rapid transit/subways that people will use
- Put transit in existing as well as future communities
- Improve transit elsewhere, not only along VIVA routes (i.e. 7 and 11)
- Need route planning tools for transit throughout the GTA as transportation is a GTA-wide problem.
- Provide more local transit (i.e. GO’s problem is just accommodating existing passengers let alone growth as 60% arrive in cars)
- Determine the cost effectiveness of subways and other forms of transit.
- Learn from the Europe example in that navigating of transit is much easier.
- Compare transit subsidization with international examples
 - GO r/c – 85%
 - Europe r/c – 50%
- Look at transit as essential urban services, not as business
- Make water more expensive. It is too easy to waste
- Encourage usage of rain barrels etc. to conserve water
- Need more environmentally sustainable solutions than the YDSS
- Make all housing units water metered
- Design or re-construct infrastructure to accommodate increasingly common “Freak storms”

Public Engagement and Partnerships

- Change people’s attitude, mind set is not on transit
 - First priority of new Canadian is to buy a car
 - People don’t seem to mind driving long distances
- Discourage automobile usage for short distance travel and encourage people to walk

- Determine the point at which people change behaviour
- York Region has to be a leader in this changing behaviour – need to walk the talk
- Need to get all facts on the table to allow balanced decisions

Community Building Approach

- Get builders on board to increase New Urbanism type of developments.
- Better shared use of facilities
- Address the challenge of moving from the past to sustainable communities of future
- Existing communities have been designed as car friendly, need sidewalks, bike facilities etc.
- Need intensification in centres and corridors – smart intensification
- York hold symposiums but need to “walk the talk”
- Need to allow more high rise buildings.
- Create more choice in residential development as high rise is more sustainable
- Reduce the environmental footprint through intensification
- If energy costs go up then we need communities that are self sufficient
- Live, work, shop, play in same community
- Need stricter building standards
- Macro view is important but so is micro perspective. (e.g. smart commute and TMA’s to personalize travel choices.

Break out Session #7 – Community Design for the Future

Top Three Priorities

- 1. Stronger Regional role in design***
- 2. Shift from “suburban” to “urban”***
- 3. Include “green” elements in design***

Automobile Use and Parking

- Promote underground or structured parking.
- View existing surface parking lots as place holders for future, compact development
- Establish parking authorities and encourage partnerships with transit providers.

Green Linkages/ Public Spaces

- Landscape and greening represent the living aspect of the built form
- Plan and implement green linkages within and between communities.
- No barriers and increase linkages (walking etc.)
- Build pedestrian friendly, integrated spaces now
- Create “living” centres
- The built form and design of communities should provide opportunities for people to gather.
- Retrofit existing communities with more open space and green linkages.

Culture & Heritage

- Consider culture and heritage as the fourth element of sustainability
- Define and design place making

Community Building

- Promote mixed use and intensification
- Municipalities should control development
- Any new projects should consider how to fix/improve existing area
- Provide opportunities for people to come to these communities
- Conduct an evaluation of municipal tools to determine what needs to be done.
- Municipalities should plan for development on a community-wide basis, rather than on a site-by-site basis.
- Make more connections between municipalities, regions, communities, individuals and public
- Implement good design
- Promote the Urban vision as sustainable (not suburban) - People need to explicitly know this
- Note that business follows people

Sustainability Lens

- When things get expensive, people use other methods
- Human concerns = services (not parking)
- Greater regional role.