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BEST PRACTICES FOR NEW COMMUNITIES WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends:

- 1. Receipt of the presentation by John Waller, Director, Long Range and Strategic Planning; and**
- 2. Adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated December 8, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Staff use the feedback from the *Best Practices for New Communities Workshop* as a basis to develop criteria for new communities within the Regional Official Plan.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the local municipalities for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is to inform Regional Council of the results and feedback from York Region's *Best Practices for New Communities Workshop (Best Practices Workshop)* held on December 5, 2008. The feedback from this workshop will be used to create criteria for new communities within York Region's Official Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

Phase 3 of the New Communities Strategy Workplan has been completed

Following the recommendations of the *Towards Sustainability in York Region Advisory Group* on how to make the Regional Official Plan (ROP) and Infrastructure Master Plans more sustainable, York Region held the *York Region New Communities Workshop* on November 22, 2006. Participants at this workshop discussed potential development in the Region's Whitebelt, with respect to creating new compact communities, ensuring sustainable infrastructure and a complete and linked natural heritage system.

In December 2007, York Region released the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper*. This paper was intended to simulate discussion on the development of

the potential new communities of York Region and provide a basis for future new community criteria. The paper includes 42 best practices organized into 10 theme areas:

- Sustainable Community Planning
- Energy
- Water Management
- Green Buildings
- Creating Liveable, Vibrant Communities
- Sustainable Transportation
- Green Space
- Natural Heritage System
- Sustainable Community Economics
- Measuring and Reporting Progress

On December 13, 2007, Regional Council endorsed Clause 2 of Report 10 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee, which included the updated “Next Steps Workplan” for the New Communities Strategy (See Figure 1). The Workplan is made up of 5 phases, which includes the *New Communities Workshop* and the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* as Phases 1 and 2. The *Best Practices Workshop* was held on December 5, 2008, therefore completing Phase 3 of the Workplan.

Figure 1: New Communities Strategy Workplan



Four speakers addressed 80 participants at the *Best Practices Workshop*, discussing a wide range of topics that included specific examples of innovative best practices

A total of 80 stakeholders attended the *Best Practices Workshop*. Attendees represented a broad mix of stakeholders, as illustrated in Table 1. The half day workshop included presentations and a facilitated breakout discussion. The agenda has been included as *Attachment 1* to this report.

Table 1
Best Practices Workshop Attendees

Category	Number of Attendees
Development Industry	25
Consultants (Planning/Engineering)	16
Local Municipal Staff	13
Regional Staff	14
Other (Environmental, Provincial Staff, NGOs, etc.)	12

Note: This table does not include speakers, facilitators or recorders

The workshop began with presentations from four speakers: Karen Antonio-Hadcock (York Region), Dan Leeming (The Planning Partnership), Jamie James (The Windmill Development Group), and Andrew Pride (The Minto Group). The speakers discussed a wide range of topics, including the elements of good urban design and sustainable design, emerging external issues that will continue to impact York Region, and a detailed look at a number of communities that showcase innovative best practices. A copy of each presentation has been placed on the Region's website under the *Planning for Tomorrow* section.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Breakout groups discussed what our future communities should look like and what must be done to achieve these ideals

Attendees of the *Best Practices Workshop* were divided into 5 groups to participate in a facilitated breakout discussion. Using the themes of the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* as a guide, each group discussed the following four questions:

1. What should our new communities look like?
2. What specific components/policies/design characteristics achieve this?
3. What are the key challenges/opportunities for implementation of these elements?
4. Identify 3 – 5 key best practices.

Attendees expressed that education and flexibility are integral to achieving the ideal future communities

The discussion that occurred in each breakout group was recorded by Regional planning staff. These detailed notes are included with this staff report as *Attachment 2*. A quick summary of what was heard at the workshop was presented at the end of the session. The summary has been included with this staff report as *Attachment 3*. The following represents a summary of the key ideas/themes heard at the workshop:

- Education is key – the public, stakeholders, government, developers, etc. need to understand the key issues, why we need to make these changes and how we can get there.
- Innovation needs to be promoted, rewarded and recognized.
- We need to re-evaluate the standards and rules currently in place – it is difficult to be creative under the existing rules; flexibility is required.
- Allow for future proofing – create more flexible and adaptable communities that will easily transition into future land uses, technologies, urban design and intensification levels.
- The status quo, and even baby steps towards sustainability, is not longer acceptable – policies that cause “great changes” should be the only choice.
- Policies should be coordinated between all levels of government.
- Carbon neutral communities should be a long term goal, but we need to begin ramping up to this now.
- We need to take an integrated systems approach for water, energy, transportation, etc. to obtain multiple benefits.
- We need to shift the burden of costs to users – paying for actual costs of resources, such as energy and water, will change consumption patterns.
- The economic advantages of shifting to sustainable development needs to be demonstrated.

Many innovative ideas were suggested by workshop attendees to be used in York Region’s future communities

Throughout the workshop, participants expressed the need for new communities in York Region to be based on innovative, leading edge sustainable practices. Many innovative ideas for new communities were discussed, particularly those that have been successfully used in other communities. Examples of these ideas include:

- Land uses should be more mixed and integrated (residential, retail, commercial, places of work).
- Public spaces and squares (piazzas) should be prominent.
- Smaller parks should be distributed throughout communities to better serve residents and provide linkages for natural heritage.
- Communities should be organized and built around transit, trails and bike paths – not retrofitted with them afterwards.
- Standards of a maximum 5 minute walking distance to transit should be enforced.
- Communities should be designed to capture passive/active solar gain.
- Energy Star should be required Region-wide as a first step towards “zero carbon” communities.
- Community Energy Plans should be mandatory in all communities, and require district heating and energy, along with a mandate that on-site generation supply both the community and adjacent neighbourhoods.
- Alternative standards for municipal roads should be considered.

- Expectations for winter road maintenance need to be revised to allow for permeable surfaces on roadways and roadside vegetation for filtration.
- A greening plan should be undertaken to naturalize or reforest Greenbelt lands to provide linked ribbons of green through communities.
- LEED standard buildings should be a minimum standard.
- Stormwater management should be rethought to include: permeable surfaces, rainwater capture, third pipe systems and engineered wetlands.
- Transit should be provided from the start.

Attendees want further discussion of these issues and to see policies incorporated into the ROP

At the end of the workshop, all attendees were asked to complete an evaluation form regarding the content and setup of the half day session. 100% of the returned evaluations rated their overall satisfaction with the workshop as either “Good” or “Excellent”. Most of the written feedback commended the Region on the organization and content of the workshop, yet wished the breakout discussion had been longer. In addition, attendees would like to see discussion continue with stakeholders, a report back on the workshop’s feedback, and the ideas discussed at the workshop incorporated into the ROP. The detailed feedback from the evaluation forms has been included with this staff report as *Attachment 4*.

Feedback from the *Best Practices Workshop* will be used to update community building policies within the ROP

During the winter/spring of 2009, Regional planning staff will be reviewing and updating the policies of York Region’s ROP. The feedback received during the *Best Practices Workshop* will be used to create criteria for new communities within York Region. These criteria will then be integrated into the ROP’s Section 5.2, which relates to Community Building.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The discussion that occurred at the *Best Practices Workshop* covered a wide range of topics, with the intent to visualize the ideal future communities of York Region. The feedback speaks to all of the Region’s Vision 2026 goals, especially that of “Quality Communities for a Diverse Population”, “Housing Choices for our Residents”, and “Managed and Balanced Growth”.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of the Region’s *Best Practices Workshop* was covered within the Planning and Development Services Department budget allocations for the fiscal year of 2008.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Representatives from all nine local municipalities attended the *Best Practices Workshop* and contributed to the discussion. Their input will be used to create criteria for new communities within York Region's ROP. Further consultation with local municipalities will continue as the ROP update progresses.

7. CONCLUSION

On December 5, 2008 York Region held the *Best Practices Workshop*, completing Phase 3 of the New Communities Strategy Workplan. The feedback from this workshop will be used to create criteria for new communities that will be incorporated into York Region's ROP. Key development industry, local municipality and environmental stakeholders attended the workshop and discussed what future communities should look like, what best practices can be used to achieve these ideals, and how we can implement these practices.

Attendees of the workshop discussed a wide variety of topics and best practices that could be used in future communities. Some of the key themes and ideas that emerged from the workshop's discussion included the concepts of education, flexibility, and coordination.

A review and update of the ROP will be undertaken in the winter/spring of 2009. During this time, the feedback from the *Best Practices Workshop* will be used to update the policies of Section 5.2 "Community Building". Further consultation will occur when the ROP Review is underway.

For more information on this report, please contact John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning at 905-830-4444 Ext. 1525.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The four attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)