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YORK REGION NEW COMMUNITIES WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, January 8, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse the “Next Steps Workplan” outlined in Section 4.5.
2. A copy of this staff report be distributed to all area municipalities for information purposes and to request input on how to effectively implement the endorsed Next Steps Workplan.
3. A copy of this staff report be distributed to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for information purposes.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is to inform Regional Council of the results and feedback from York Region’s *New Communities Workshop* held on November 22, 2006 at the Glenway Country Club in Newmarket.

The endorsed next steps referred to in the Recommendations Section will assist the Region in its Growth Management initiatives and provide a basis for developing a new generation of communities within the Region.

3. BACKGROUND

The purpose of this workshop was two-fold:

1. To discuss potential development in the Region’s whitebelt with respect to creating new compact communities, ensuring sustainable infrastructure and a completing and linking the natural heritage system.
2. To expand on discussions held at the *Natural Heritage System Workshop* on November 1st on how to integrate the Region’s natural heritage into new community development.

The context for land-use planning is changing as communities face a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues. Using a sustainability lens, this section will

discuss the regional and global drivers that are influencing the role of planning and prompting a re-examination what constitutes effective community-building.

3.1 Sustainability Initiative: The Towards Sustainability in York Region Advisory Group

In June 2006, Regional Council received the final report of the *Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group* on how to make the Regional Official Plan (ROP) and Infrastructure Master Plans more sustainable. Specifically, one of the recommendations states: “*Organize a design charrette with all stakeholders to explore the issues and opportunities in developing new Greenfield communities*” (p.14).

Although not a design charrette by definition, the New Communities Workshop represents one step towards fulfilling this TSYR recommendation and strengthening the dialogue about re-examining the fundamentals of new community development.

3.2 Regional Context

According to the Provincial forecasts contained in the *Places to Grow Plan*, the Region is expected to have 1.5 million residents by 2031, as well as, 780,000 jobs and 500,000 households. To accompany these forecasts, the *Places to Growth Plan* and the *Greenbelt Plan* have established parameters on where and how this growth will be distributed throughout the Region. Specifically, the parameters outlined in the *Places to Grow Plan* include:

- Of the total new household units forecasted for the Region by 2031, just over 80,000 new household units or 40 % are to locate in existing developed areas.
- The remaining 60% or approximately 140,000 new units are expected to locate in new development areas including the Region’s whitebelt areas. Whitebelt areas refer to the Region’s remaining undesignated greenfield areas outside the boundary of the Greenbelt Plan.
- The designated greenfield areas in the Region be planned to achieve a minimum density target that is not less than 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare.



The *Greenbelt* and *Places to Grow* Plans identify very limited areas where development can occur to accommodate this significant growth. The objectives of compact communities, sustainable infrastructure and a linked natural heritage system present challenges that require an innovative and comprehensive approach to new community development.

The Region has embarked upon a growth management strategy that incorporates sustainability principles. The values of “Sustainable Natural Environment”, “Healthy Communities”, and “Economic Vitality” (the themes of the Regional Official Plan (ROP)) will be simultaneously integrated into all growth-related decisions. In this way,

the Region can effectively plan for complete and healthy communities over the next 30 to 50 years.

3.3 Growth Management Public Engagement Initiative

In September 2006, Regional Council received an update report on the *Growth Management Public Information and Engagement Program*. This report highlighted key issues that were raised at a series of public forums and focus groups during the spring and summer of 2006. The key issues relevant to this staff report are as follows:

Growth/ Congestion and the Provision of Services: The majority of residents at the public meetings recognized that growth was likely going to happen, however there was significant discussions regarding the pace of growth. As well, questions were raised as to whether our human services, transit and transportation systems and water and sewer services can keep pace with the growth.

Sustainability: Many people and organizations expressed the opinion that future growth and development be sustainable from a number of perspectives including energy, security of food sources, water, air and the natural environment and financial resources. Adoption of a triple bottom-line analysis (natural environment, economy, community) of major decisions would assist in this regard.

Quality of Life/Urban Design: The maintenance of the quality of life enjoyed by the Region's residents was part of most discussions at the public meetings. Aspects raised included the amount of time spent commuting, the quality of community design and the availability of human services.

3.4 Global Trends Affecting Communities

The Region's built environment will be consistently influenced and affected by global trends related to social equity, the environment, the economy, health and resource consumption. The following are the current global issues that warrant consideration when planning new communities:

- Changing demographics: an aging and more ethnically diversified society
- Energy
- Climate Change
- Public Health: specifically obesity, cardiovascular and mental illnesses
- Increased urbanization
- Resource consumption
- Social Cohesion: addressing poverty and isolation.

Considering the nature of discussion at both the TSYR Advisory Group and the Growth Management Engagement Forums, along with emerging global trends, the Region's objective in hosting the New Communities Workshop was to discuss the social, economic and environmental opportunities and challenges in planning new communities in the whitebelt areas.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The following outlines the event and feedback from the attendees.

4.1 Agenda and Speakers

The workshop was a half day forum, beginning at 8:00am and adjourning at 1:00pm. The complete agenda of the workshop, including a list of speakers/presentations, is included in this report as *Attachment 1*.

4.2 Attendees

A total of 61 Regional stakeholders and organizations attended the workshop from such diverse industry sectors as government, environment, and the development industry. Table 1 below provides a breakdown of attendees by industry sector.

Table 1
New Communities Workshop Attendees by Sector

Sector	No. of Attendees	% Attendees
Conservation Authority	7	12%
Development Industry	11	18%
Environmental Groups	13	21%
Environmental Consultant	1	2%
Area Municipal	13	21%
Government		
Regional Government	14	23%
Provincial Government	2	3%
TOTAL	61	100%

4.3 Summary of Presentations

The first portion of the workshop consisted of speaker presentations about the context of the Region's whitebelt, global planning issues and trends, as well as various case studies on urban forms that work. The key messages from the presentations are summarized below:

- The Region has a limited amount of remaining greenfield areas. Protected Greenbelt land, environmental features and buffers further reduce the amount of available land, and create small pockets of isolated developable land. The Region faces challenges in the way it will plan compact communities, a linked natural heritage system, and sustainable infrastructure within the whitebelt.
- The Region's built environment will both influence and be affected by global planning issues such as: energy, an aging population, climate change, and health.

There are many examples of urban form across Canada that work. Future planning should follow these examples to address the above issues.

Presentation slides for the above two presentations are included in this report as *Attachment 2*.

4.4 Participant Feedback “What was Heard”

4.4.1 Break out Sessions

The break-out session addressed the challenges and opportunities of planning new communities within the whitebelt and other greenfield areas. Attendees were asked four questions:

1. What are the key elements and attributes of: a) compact communities; b) linked natural heritage systems; and, c) integrated infrastructure.
2. What are the key issues, conflicts, and opportunities for compact communities, linked natural heritage systems, and integrated infrastructure?
3. What is the right balance of natural heritage and community areas?
4. What are your ideas for how we can move forward; are there opportunities for partnerships? What processes are needed?

Detailed notes of the break-out group discussion are contained in this staff report as *Attachment 3*.

4.4.2 Participant Conclusions

Attendees were asked to complete an evaluation form. Eighty-three percent (83%) reported that the workshop helped to expand their understanding of the challenges and opportunities of planning new communities within the whitebelt. The complete findings of the workshop evaluation form results and feedback are included as *Attachments 4* and *5*. There were a variety of strong views expressed in the Workshop as well as a considerable amount of consensus around the need for a coordinated, integrative approach for the Whitebelt.

A number of conclusions emerged from the New Communities Workshop as follows:

1. Take a new and innovative approach to community-building in the whitebelt by integrating sustainable infrastructure, a compact and intensified urban form and the natural heritage system.
2. Require that infrastructure planning emphasizes low-impact green crossing, transit, sustainable storm water management and the natural heritage system as permanent “green” infrastructure;
3. Address the issues of energy, health, changing demographics, human services, affordability, walk/transit emphasis, green buildings and quality of life in community design.
4. Consider legislative changes (i.e Planning Act, Building Code) as well as promoting awareness and education of the public and stakeholders.
5. Find innovative funding methods to address capital costs, up-keep and management.

6. Involve stakeholders from all sectors in communication and education which include additional workshops and studies to clarify specific sub-issues and produce recommendations.
7. Understand that this new approach could avoid expensive and time consuming conflicts.

Details of the workshop, including speaker presentations, have been posted on the Region's external website under the "*Planning for Tomorrow*" icon on the homepage.

4.5 Next Steps Workplan

Regional staff will use the feedback from the New Communities Workshop and other related forums to pursue opportunities to re-examine the elements of new community development in the Region's whitebelt. Next steps include:

- Distributing the workshop break-out group feedback to participants for their review and input.
- Holding future public consultations and design charrettes to build on discussions from the workshop.
- Creating a discussion best practices paper that lays out how the Region's new communities will be different with respect to energy, waste, transportation, health, live/work relationship and other issues raised in the workshop.
- Establishing principles for new community development to be incorporated in the ROP review. These principles will set the stage for developing future standards on new community development.
- Acting as a model to the public by continuing to implement Regional minimum standard of LEED silver for all Regional buildings.
- Reporting back on the Natural Heritage System Workshop that complements the discussions in the New Communities Workshop. This report is also an item on the Committee agenda.
- Integrating feedback into the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy
- Update ROP and Infrastructure Master Plans using the workshop feedback to ensure the provision of sustainable, healthy and complete communities.

4.6 Relationship to Vision 2026

This staff report speaks to several goal areas of Vision 2026, including "Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture", "Responding to the Needs of Our Residents", "Managed and Balanced Growth", "Infrastructure for a Growing Region" and "Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region".

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total cost of the Region's New Communities Workshop is approximately \$8,267.17. This amount is within the budget allocation for the Planning and Development Services

Department for the fiscal year 2006. Any additional costs resulting from the workshop will be reported to Regional Council in a subsequent staff report.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Area municipalities participated in the New Communities Workshop. Their input will assist the Region in re-examining the elements of new community development. Their knowledge and expertise in their respective municipality also helped to inform attendees of the Region's diverse and unique features.

7. CONCLUSION

The New Communities Workshop successfully brought together representatives from diverse sectors to generate ideas on the challenges and opportunities of planning new communities in the Region's whitebelt and other greenfield areas. The *Greenbelt* and *Places to Grow* Plans identify very limited areas throughout the Region where development can occur to accommodate new growth over the next 30 years. The objectives of compact communities, sustainable infrastructure and a linked natural heritage system present challenges that require an innovative and comprehensive approach to new community development.

The main conclusions that emerged from the workshop include: integrating compact communities, sustainable infrastructure with the natural heritage system; requiring infrastructure to employ more sustainable and green practices; addressing the issues of health, energy, changing demographics, human services and transit; involving all stakeholders from diverse disciplines to refine details and produce recommendations.

The ideas generated from this workshop, as well as the Natural Heritage Workshop, will be used to establish standards for new community development, formulate new policy in the updates to the ROP and Infrastructure Master Plans, and provide input to the upcoming Sustainability Strategy.

For further information about this report, please contact John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning at 905-830-4444 ext. 1525 or john.waller@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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