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YORK REGION PRELIMINARY DRAFT SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

1. The presentation by Dawn Seetaram, Planner, Long Range and Strategic Planning, be received; and
2. The recommendations contained in the following report dated March 7, 2007, from the Chief Administrative Officer, be adopted:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council receive the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy contained in *Attachment 1*.
2. Regional Council direct staff to consult with stakeholders and report back with a final Sustainability Strategy.
3. A copy of this staff report be circulated to Area Municipalities and the Provincial Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Public Infrastructure and Renewal, the Environment, Natural Resources and Economic Development and Trade for their information and comments.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is to propose the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy for York Region as the basis for further stakeholder consultation.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 What is Sustainability?



In October 2005, Regional Council received a staff report that introduced the concept of sustainability. The United Nations defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own”. Creating this inter-generational legacy involves integrating the three values of *sustainable natural environment, economic vitality and social equity* into all Regional decision-making processes.

3.2 Drivers of Sustainability

The role of Regional government as a service provider and policy-maker is changing as communities face a wide-range of social, economic and environmental issues. This section will focus on the issues from both global and regional perspectives.

3.2.1 Emerging Global Trends

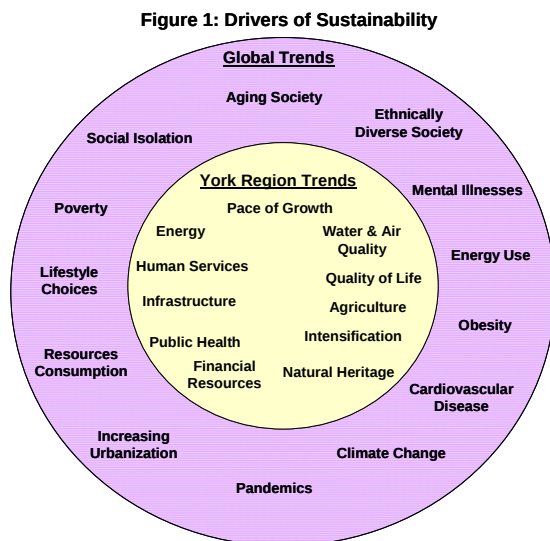
The Region's communities will be affected by global trends related to social equity, the environment, the economy, health and resource consumption. The *New Communities Workshop* held on November 22 and other stakeholder forums identified the following current global issues facing Regional residents and employees:

- Changing demographics: An aging and more ethnically diversified society
- Energy consumption and alternative energy sources
- Public health issues such as child and adult obesity, cardiovascular diseases, pandemics and mental illnesses
- Climate Change
- Increasing urbanization
- Resource consumption and lifestyle choices
- Social cohesion and addressing poverty and isolation.

3.2.2 York Region Trends

According to 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. Given this forecast, the Region hosted various public consultation forums throughout the year 2006. The purpose of these forums was to inform Regional stakeholders and partners on growth management and sustainability; determine the issues that were important to residents and employees; and, to generate ideas on how to address these issues so that the Region can become more sustainable. These forums included:

- The "Towards a Sustainable Region" Symposium on March 3, 2006. A staff report on the results and feedback was received by Council in May 2006.
- Several Growth Management public meetings and focus groups during the spring and summer of 2006. Various updates have been received by Council including the most recent in September 2006.



- The Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group. Their final report was received and key recommendations were endorsed by Regional Council in June 2006.

A number of themes emerged from these public forums. They include:

- Provision of human services and infrastructure systems that keep pace with growth
- Protection and investment in a linked natural heritage system
- Strategically planned intensification in Regional Centres and Corridors
- The maintenance of the Region's high quality of life.
- Agriculture as a viable industry
- Sustainable development including energy, security of food sources, water, air, the natural environment and financial resources.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Why a Sustainability Strategy?

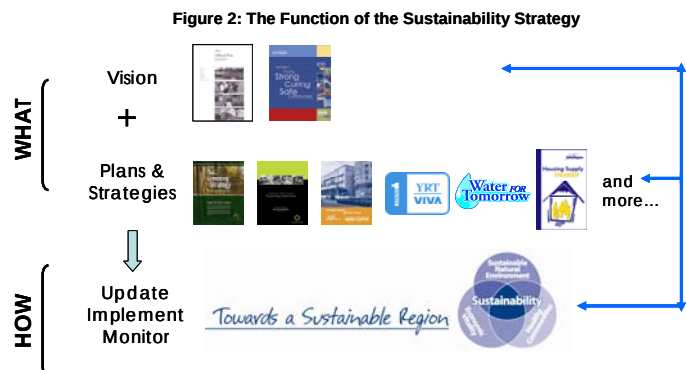
The purpose of the Sustainability Strategy is to provide a long-term framework for making smarter decisions about growth management and municipal responsibilities that better integrate the economy, environment and community. Other reasons for pursuing the strategy include the following reasons:

- 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.
- Aligns and coordinates current initiatives, and identifies gaps.
- Addresses the expectation and values of our public, stakeholders and employees.
- Provides leadership not only to our public, but also in the provincial and national arenas.

The Sustainability Strategy will play a coordinating function of compiling all the Region's sustainability initiatives under one strategic plan. In this way, the Region can better evaluate and strengthen our progress in order to fully realize the Region's impact on sustainability planning.

4.2 The Function of the Sustainability Strategy

The Region has built a strong foundation for sustainability over the years with an extensive portfolio of initiatives outlined in Attachment 1. In essence, these initiatives, which are governed by the Regional Official Plan and Vision 2026, represent "**what**" the Region is doing in the way of sustainability. As Figure 2 illustrates,



the function of the Sustainability Strategy will be to focus on **“how”** the Region implements these initiatives.

It is interesting to note that the “what” and “how” are not necessarily separate or linear processes. In fact, applying these guiding principles in the formulation of the preliminary draft strategy has resulted in new proposed actions that the Region can implement to further achieve sustainability. In other words, the Sustainability Strategy is meant to be an evolving document with a cyclical process of continuous monitoring and improvement. This evolution requires collaboration, integration and partnerships with all corporate departments, Regional stakeholders and partners, and a public that is well-informed and actively involved.

4.2.1 Guiding Principles for Implementation – “How”

The sustainability strategy calls for a different perspective on how to implement Regional initiatives. The Strategy is founded on eight guiding principles for implementation. These principles are based on research, public consultation and consultations with various sustainability experts:

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

4.3 Action Areas

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

- Corporate Culture of Sustainability
- Healthy Communities
- Economic Vitality
- Sustainable Natural Environment
- Education, Engagement and Partnerships
- Sustainability Implementation and Monitoring

The Sustainability Strategy identifies approximately 80 actions. A number of these actions are already underway.

Table 1 illustrates examples of items proposed under each action area.

Table 1
Sustainability Strategy Action Examples

Action Area	Action Example
Corporate Culture of Sustainability	• Initiate a sustainability training program to further engage staff, senior management and Regional Council • Prepare a green procurement strategy that ensures that environmentally friendly and biodegradable products are given first priority
Healthy Communities	• Continue to support human services by advocating for adequate funding and by fostering civic engagement • Continue to investigate innovative funding tools to promote intensification
Economic Vitality	• Ensure a triple-bottom line assessment of infrastructure initiatives and context sensitive design • Develop a local food source strategy that increases awareness about production, processing and distribution.
Sustainable Natural Environment	• Identify and adopt a linked natural heritage system in collaboration with stakeholders, partners, area municipalities and conservation authorities • Adopt a clean air strategy for York Region
Education, Engagement and Partnerships	• Showcase the Region's sustainability initiatives. • Produce a citizens' brochure and website on how the Region and its residents can contribute towards achieving sustainability.
Sustainability Implementation and Monitoring	• Develop a sustainability assessment template for all Regional policies, initiatives, and staff reports. • Report annually to the public and stakeholders on sustainability initiatives, indicators and issues.

The full listing of proposed actions organized under these areas is contained in *Attachment 1*.

4.4 Implementation and Monitoring

Over the course of the Sustainability Strategy consultative process, an implementation action plan will be completed. This action plan will include:

- Priority-setting of action items.

- Triple-bottom line assessments to determine economic, environmental and social benefits.
- Performance measures including indicators and targets.
- Corporate responsibility and accountability which involve identifying department leads, costing, timing monitoring documents and other resources.

The template for the implementation action plan is included in this staff report in *Attachment 1*.

4.5 Next Steps and Timelines

The next steps that Regional staff will undertake towards implementing the Sustainability Strategy include:

- Print and distribute the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy to area municipalities, key ministries and stakeholders.
- Consultation on the preliminary draft strategy with Regional stakeholders, partners and various sustainability experts (Spring 2007)
- Regional Council approval of the Final Sustainability Strategy (Summer 2007)
- Implementation (Summer 2007 and onwards)

Figure 3: Sustainability Strategy Timeline

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					

As part of the implementation and monitoring component of the Sustainability Strategy, staff will look at the possibility of holding sustainability workshops, symposiums and/or focus groups with key stakeholders.

4.6 Relationship to Vision 2026

The eight goal areas of Vision 2026 speak to all the sustainability principles and values emphasized in the Sustainability Strategy. In April 2006, Regional Council adopted “*Vision 2026: Towards a Sustainable Region: Fourth Annual Report on Indicators of Progress*” which demonstrates how Vision 2026 is working towards fulfilling its goals under a stronger sustainability lens. Regional Council is expected to receive the fifth annual report in May 2007 that will further align Vision 2026 with the Sustainability Strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications associated with the York Region Sustainability Strategy. The process is being undertaken within the existing staff complement and budget allocation for the Planning and Development Services

Department and the CAO's Office. Many of the programs and policies listed in this preliminary draft are already accounted for in existing department business plans throughout the Corporation. The action items that are not presently covered will be subject to separate business case reports to Regional Council during the implementation phase of the Sustainability Strategy.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Area municipalities already have a number of progressive sustainability initiatives underway and are outlined in Attachment 1. Collaboration with all of the Region's stakeholders and partners is fundamental to the concept of sustainability. Area municipalities will be fully engaged in the York Region Sustainability Strategy process.

7. CONCLUSION

The Region has a strong foundation for sustainability which is strategically framed in the *Regional Official Plan* and *Vision 2026*. The Region continues to make progress with sustainability initiatives such as VIVA Rapid Transit, LEED Standard Regional Facilities, the TSYR Advisory Group and the Greening Strategy.

The Sustainability Strategy will provide a long-term framework for making smarter decisions about growth management and municipal responsibilities that better integrate the economy, environment and communities. This framework consists of a series of action items that are organized under the areas of: corporate culture of sustainability, healthy communities, economic vitality, sustainable natural environment, public engagement, education and partnerships, and implementation and monitoring.

The Region will hold a series of stakeholder consultations in the spring 2007, in order to refine the components of the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy included in this staff report. The intention is to bring forward a Final Sustainability Strategy for Regional Council approval in the summer of 2007.

A formal Sustainability Strategy will enable the Region, our employees and public to fully realize, track and strengthen the positive impact of all the Region's sustainability initiatives. This decision-making model will enrich the quality of life for regional communities and position the Region as a leader in sustainability-based governance in Canada.

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

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is included with this report.)