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YORK REGION "TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE REGION" SYMPOSIUM FEEDBACK

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Dawn Seeteram, Planner, Long Range and Strategic Planning, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendation contained in the following report, May 10, 2006, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Regional Council receive this staff report for information purposes.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is to inform Regional Council of the results and feedback from the Region's "*Towards a Sustainable Region*" Symposium held on March 3, 2006 at the Kortright Centre for Conservation in Woodbridge. This event represented the launch of the Region's *Growth Management Public Information and Engagement Program* that integrates the theme of sustainability.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Context

According to Ontario Government forecasts, the Region is expected to have 1.5 million residents by 2031, as well as, 780,000 jobs and 500,000 households. Given this forecasted pace of growth, the Region has embarked on an update of its growth management strategy that will incorporate the theme of sustainability. That is, the values of Sustainable Natural Environment, Healthy Communities and Economic Vitality (the themes of the *Regional Official Plan*) will be simultaneously integrated into all growth-related decisions.

3.2 York Region Sustainability Initiative and Growth Management Public Information and Engagement Program

The "*Towards a Sustainable Region*" Symposium, and overall sustainability approach to growth management in the Region, fulfills components of both the *York Region*

Sustainability Initiative and the Growth Management Public Information and Engagement Program.

In October, 2005, Regional Council endorsed the “*York Region Sustainable Development Initiative and Proposed Work Plan*”. Action Item #1 of this work plan proposes to “*Incorporate a sustainable development theme into the Growth Management Work Plan to be used as part of an extensive public consultation on growth issues.*”

Similarly, in December 2005, Regional Council endorsed the *Growth Management Public Information and Engagement Work Plan* for the Region’s Growth Management Initiative. This work plan proposes a Sustainability Symposium as a vehicle to “get the message out” to the public, and investigate and explore the issues of:

- Population and Employment Growth
- Natural Environment
- Economic Development
- Human Services
- Transportation and Transit
- Infrastructure Planning
- Community Design

On March 3rd, 2006, the Region hosted the “*Towards a Sustainable Region*” Symposium at the Kortright Centre for Conservation to launch the beginning of the Region’s Growth Management Public Information and Engagement Program. The purpose of the symposium was to help the Region, its partners and stakeholders identify key issues and develop an action plan for sustainable growth management in York Region from a sustainability perspective. The ideas generated during the symposium have and continue to be used to foster further discussion in a series of public open houses throughout April and May of 2006.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Details of the symposium, including speaker presentations, are posted on the Region’s external website under the “*Planning for Tomorrow*” icon on the home page. The following showcases the highlights of the event and feedback from the attendees.

4.1 Agenda and Speakers

The Symposium was a half day forum beginning at 8:30am and adjourning at 1:00pm. The agenda consisted of:

- Welcome greetings from Mayor Michael Di Biase, City of Vaughan
- Presentation by York Regional Chairman and CEO Bill Fisch
- Keynote Address by Bob Willard, author of “*The Sustainability Advantage*” and “*The Next Sustainability Wave*”

- Panel Discussion:
 - Moderator: David Wheeler, Director of the International Centre of Research Innovation in Sustainability, York University
 - Tom Ryley: Executive Vice-President of Suncor Energy Inc.
 - Brian Denney: Chief Administrator Officer, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
 - Rahul Bhardwaj: Chief Executive Officer, United Way of York Region
 - Dr. Greg Baeker: Senior Consultant, AuthentiCity.
- Break out Sessions and Feedback
- Closing Remarks and Next Steps by Bryan Tuckey, Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, York Region.

The complete agenda of the symposium and speaker biographies are included in this report as *Attachments 1* and *2*, respectively.

4.2 Attendees

A total of 158 Regional stakeholders and organizations attended the Symposium from such diverse industry sectors as government, business, human services and the environment. Also in attendance were members of Local and Regional Council and the Mayors of King Township, Markham, East Gwillimbury, Aurora, Whitchurch-Stouffville and Vaughan. Table 1 below provides a breakdown of attendees by industry sector.

Table 1
“Towards a Sustainable Region” Symposium Attendees by Sector

Sector	No. of Attendees	% Attendees
Elected Officials	16	10%
Human Services	17	11%
Business	32	20%
Environment	26	16%
Institutions	5	3%
Government	62	39%
TOTAL	158	100%

There was Provincial representation from the Ministries of Culture, Environment, Energy, Public Infrastructure and Renewal, Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Transportation and the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski M.P. and the Constituency Manager for Ms. Belinda Stronach, M.P. also attended.

With respect to media, representatives from the Toronto Star, Rogers Cable Television, the A-Channel and the York Region Newspaper Group (YRNG) covered the Symposium.

Broadcasts featuring the Symposium aired on Rodgers Television and the A-Channel, and articles were written in the Era Banner and the Novae Rae Irbis Newsletter – GTA Edition.

4.3 Summary of Speakers Messages

The first portion of the symposium consisted of a series of speaker presentations about the thinking and interpretation of the sustainability concept and its application to the operation and management of business, government and public sector organizations. The key messages from the public and private representatives speaking on behalf of various sustainability perspectives are highlighted below:

Bill Fisch, York Regional Chair and CEO

The Region has made some significant steps forward with the Greening Strategy, VIVA Rapid Transit, the Centres and Corridors Strategy and Water for Tomorrow. However, the Region has more work to do on this journey towards sustainability with respect to creating vibrant and mixed-use Regional Centres, engaging the public and identifying innovative ways of working with federal, provincial and municipal partners.

Bob Willard, author of “The Next Sustainability Wave” and “The Sustainability Advantage”

The business case for a sustainability strategy is based on the integration of corporate social responsibility values, senior leadership and educational awareness within the company organizational structure. This approach not only results in increased financial profit, but also produces value-added social and human capital, such as greater employee productivity, retention of top talent, and the alignment of company values with those of its people.

Tom Ryley, Executive Vice-President, Suncor Energy Inc.

As a sustainable energy company, Suncor is reducing greenhouse gas emissions by utilizing ethanol, wind power and ultra low sulphur diesel. The challenges to this approach are dealing with multiple levels of government involvement and requirements, integrating different interest groups, escalating standards and balancing prescriptive practices versus performance commitments.

Brian Denney, CAO, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

To further integrate the environmental imperative into sustainability decision-making, three key ideas include: 1) energy efficiency and renewable energy; 2) protecting and enhancing natural heritage systems, and 3) creating a healthy environment including the elimination of toxins, local food production and air quality improvement.

Rahul Bhardwaj, CEO, United Way of York Region

Urban planning is a public health issue. Focus on designing communities in which people can choose not to drive as increased automobile usage raises the probability of obesity and reduces involvement in community affairs. The health of communities also requires

the reduction of the immigrant unemployment rate which is triple the rate of the Canadian born.

Dr. Greg Baeker, Senior Consultant, Authenticity

Foster the new knowledge-based economy, develop a “sense of place” identity for York Region communities and provide opportunities for residents to engage in various forms of cultural expressions. The Region should involve the cultural sector. This objective can be achieved by holding “Made in York Region” cultural forums, beginning a cultural mapping process, and subsequently, launching a Regional cultural plan.

4.4 Break-out Session Feedback “What was Heard”

The break out session consisted of seven groups with the following 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 Design for the Future

The points raised in these discussion groups are detailed as *Attachment 3*. Each group identified three top priorities to address their theme. These are listed below:

Group #1: Pace of Growth

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.

Group #2: Environment: Natural Heritage, Air and Water

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.

Group #3: Economic Vitality and Job Creation

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

Group #4: Human Services, Culture and Heritage

1. Create a “sense of place” through better design in York Region.

2. Integrate different sectors, skills and people to solve issues.
3. Plan for people, not just land use.

Group #5: Energy

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.

Group #6: Infrastructure and Congestion

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 choice.

Group #7: Community Design for the Future

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

4.5 Overall Feedback and Conclusions

Attendees were asked to complete an evaluation form. Seventy percent (70%) reported that the Symposium helped them to understand how the Region’s sustainable development and growth management initiatives relate to their community, business or organization. The complete findings of the Symposium Evaluation Form results and feedback are included as *Attachments 4 and 5*.

A number of general conclusions/ suggestions emerged from the break-out groups and feedback forms. These are as follows:

- The Region should become a leader in sustainability.
- A sustainable Region is one that: takes an interconnected environmental, economic and communities approach to decision-making, takes action, “walks the talk”, and plays a role in educating the public.
- There should be improved consultation, a better two way dialogue between the public and the Region.
- We should be more aware of the value of our natural environment (“natural capital”) and its carrying-capacity.

- There is concern about the amount, location and form of growth.
- A strong and diverse economy is based upon York Region's ability to attract and retain employers and the ability of employees to find appropriate housing, transportation and transit within the Region.
- Culture, heritage and vibrant well designed places are key components of sustainability.
- Consider energy use and conservation in the planning process, urban design, and infrastructure in all municipal decisions.
- We need to examine ways of living and decisions that have less ecological impact/ footprint.
- Take a long term view of growth management through a sustainability lens.

4.6 Next Steps

The results of the Symposium will be used to foster more in-depth discussion in a series of growth management public meetings in March through to June 2006. These forums will cover the issue areas identified at the Symposium including Population and Employment Growth, Natural Environment, Economic Development, Human Services, Transportation and Transit, Infrastructure Planning and Community Design. The feedback and results from the growth management public meetings will be brought forward in a subsequent staff report in June 2006.

The results of these discussions will inform and complement a series of initiatives that will contribute towards a long-term growth management strategy and sustainability outlook for the Region over the next 30 years. Specifically, these will comprise of:

- The Region's Growth Management initiative that integrates a sustainability theme of simultaneously creating value along environmental, economic and community-based lines and will result in revisions to the *Regional Official Plan*.
- The Infrastructure Master Plans update (water, wastewater, transit and roads) will employ sustainability principles and overall coordination with the land-use planning process and linked natural heritage system.
- Over the last few months the *Towards a Sustainability in York Region Advisory Group (TSYRAG)* has been meeting. This multi-stakeholder advisory group, consisting of members from the development industry, conservation authorities and public environmental groups, are charged with providing advice to the Region on how to make the *Regional Official Plan* more sustainable and for developing a sustainable infrastructure strategy. The advisory group findings will inform the

Regional Official Plan review and Master Plan updates in tandem with the feedback from the symposium, public meetings and focus groups. Staff will report on the findings of the TSYR Advisory Group in June 2006.

- The update of the *Regional Official Plan* and Master Plans (water, wastewater, transit and transportation) will be part of the Region's approach to sustainability. Staff will pursue other opportunities to make the Region a leader in sustainability including:
 - Fostering a corporate sustainability approach in Regional initiatives and decision-making;
 - Increasing understanding of sustainability in the Corporation and the Region;
 - Working with stakeholders and partners to pursue sustainability initiatives; and,
 - Promoting an interconnected environmental, economic and communities approach to all initiatives.

4.7 Relationship to Vision 2026

Vision 2026 incorporates many of the sustainable development principles highlighted by the United Nations and speaks to triple bottom-line sustainability through its goal areas. The document calls for engagement and interaction between the public, all relevant stakeholders and Regional Staff. Educational and awareness campaigns are also promoted.

More recently in April 2006, Regional Council adopted "*Vision 2026: Towards a Sustainable Region: Fourth Annual Report on Indicators of Progress*" which explicitly demonstrates how the Region is working towards fulfilling, not only the Vision 2026 goals areas, but the principles of sustainability. In effect, this step illustrates how another Regional initiative (in addition to the Growth Management initiative) is integrating the theme of sustainability to align with the overall intention of the *Regional Sustainability Initiative*.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total cost of the "*Towards a Sustainable Region*" Symposium is approximately \$15,000.00. This amount is within the budget allocation for the Planning and Development Services Department for the current fiscal year 2006.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Area municipalities played a key role in the “*Towards a Sustainable Region*” Symposium as their input assisted in exploring a sustainable growth management strategy for the Region. In order to ensure the continuance of high level coordination between the Region and its municipal partners, a Municipal Technical Advisory Committee has been established to facilitate further input into Regional work throughout the Growth Management Initiative.

7. CONCLUSION

The “*Towards a Sustainable Region*” Symposium successfully brought representatives from diverse industry sectors together to generate ideas for one vision of a sustainable York Region 30 to 50 years in the future. Given that the Region has to make some difficult, but critical decisions about long-term growth management, this convergence of multiple perspectives enabled the Region to gain high-level insight of how the three imperatives of sustainability (environment, economy and community) could be integrated and operationalized across the Region and within the Corporation.

Some of these actions resulting from this integration will include a sustainability approach to the Growth Management Strategy, the *Regional Official Plan* review and Infrastructure Master Plan Updates. The principles of sustainability provide a framework for more collaborative and inclusive public engagement efforts in the future. Overall, this work and further implementation of the Region’s Sustainability Initiative will position the Region as a champion of sustainability planning and decision-making, both as a Corporation and as a public deliverer of goods and services to our communities.

In regards to the Growth Management Initiative, public input is vital. The Region’s key choices have to involve collaboration with stakeholders, partners and the public about such issues as the pace of growth, transportation and infrastructure, natural environment, human services, community design and economic vitality. It is this type of partnership with our private and public citizens that will assist the Region in forging and implementing a legacy of long-term sustainable growth management for generations to come.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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