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TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY IN YORK REGION ADVISORY GROUP FINAL REPORT

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Bryan Tuckey, Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, Dr. David Bell, Chair and Facilitator of the Towards Sustainability in York Region Advisory Group, Brian Denney, C.A.O. , Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Stephen Dupuis, Executive Vice-President, Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association, and Wendy Francis, Director of Conservation and Science, Ontario Nature, be received;**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report, June 14, 2006, from the Chief Administrative Officer, be adopted; and**
- 3. A meeting be convened with the stakeholders for comments and review of the York Region Sustainability Strategy proposed workplan following the staff report to Committee this fall.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council receive this report and direct staff to report on the collective advice of the *Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group* contained in the final report (*Attachment 1*).
2. Regional Council endorse the “Seven Key Recommendations” contained in the transmittal letter of the TSYR final report, included as *Attachment 1*.
3. Staff report back on a York Region Sustainability Strategy proposed work plan.
4. This staff report be forwarded to the Provincial Minister of the Environment to demonstrate Regional fulfillment of a “multi-stakeholder advisory mechanism to develop an overall sustainable development strategy that addresses growth management, infrastructure planning, and environmental protection, including water budgeting” (*Minister of the Environment, October 1, 2004, Attachment 2*).

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is:

- To present the findings of the TSYR Advisory Group.

- To propose that Regional Council endorse the TSYR Advisory Group's "Seven Key Recommendations" contained in the final report's transmittal letter.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Context

The TSYR Advisory Group, comprised of representatives from key environmental sector and development industry stakeholders was established for following reasons:

- Over the last year, various environmental groups have raised issues regarding Regional infrastructure projects, notably the 16th and 19th Avenue YDSS projects.
- In response to this public reaction and commenting on the bump-up requests of outstanding YDSS projects, former Provincial Minister of the Environment, Leona Dombrowsky, commended the Region for its commitment to MOE to "initiate a multi-stakeholder advisory mechanism to develop an overall sustainable development strategy to address growth management, infrastructure planning, and environmental protection, including water budgeting."

3.2 TSYR Advisory Group Mandate

In September 2005, Regional Council endorsed the establishment and work plan of the *Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group*. The mandate of the Advisory Group called for the preparation of two products:

- Advice to the Region on how to make the *Regional Official Plan* a more "Sustainable Regional Plan", including next steps.
- Advice to the Region on the development of a "*Sustainable Infrastructure Strategy*", including next steps.

3.3 TSYR Advisory Group Members and Participants

The Advisory Group members are as follows:

- Regional Municipality of York – Michael Garrett as Chair
- Greater Toronto Home Builders Association – Stephen Dupuis, Executive Vice-President
- Environmental Defence Canada – Rick Smith, Executive Director
- Urban Development Institute – Neil Rodgers, President
- Ontario Nature – Wendy Francis, Director of Conservation and Science
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority – Brian Denney, CAO
- Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority – Gayle Wood, CAO

Mr. Keith West, Central Region Director of the Ministry of the Environment participated in the TSYR process as an observer.

To facilitate and coordinate the TSYR Advisory Group discussions and process, the Region engaged two consultants. Dr. David V.J. Bell, Professor Emeritus, Senior

Scholar and Former Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, acted as Facilitator. Coordination activities for the Advisory Group were undertaken by Mr. Craig Mather, P. Eng and former CAO of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Staff from the Long Range and Strategic Planning Branch provided administrative support, and staff from the Transportation and Works Department provided information updates on various Regional infrastructure projects and master plans.

All of the TSYR members listed above signed and endorsed the final report, except for Rick Smith of Environmental Defence Canada.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The TSYR Advisory Group findings consist of a covering transmittal letter signed by the Advisory Group members which contains general advice on sustainability and a more detailed report with specific advice.

The following sections highlight the findings contained in the TSYR Advisory Group Final Report as described by the members themselves.

4.1 Advice on an Overall Perspective

The solutions to the Region's growth and development challenges require a triple bottom-line sustainability approach that simultaneously creates benefits along economic, community and environmental lines. TSYR recognizes that the three themes in the *Regional Official Plan* (ROP), *Healthy Communities*, *Economic Vitality and Sustainable Natural Environment*, help define the Region's commitment to follow the path of sustainable development.

The TSYR group recognizes that the Region has made significant steps towards sustainability through its Greening Strategy, Human Services Plan, Centres and Corridors Strategy and VIVA Rapid Transit System, as well as, *Vision 2026* and the *Regional Official Plan*. However, the Advisory Group noted that in the past, it was publicly perceived that the Region did not accord the natural environment as high a priority as the economic vitality and healthy communities' component in infrastructure and land-use planning decisions.

As a result, the TSYR advisory group recommends that the Region adopt a long-term and holistic perspective to address the growth-related challenges facing the Region in the next 30 years. That is, all Regional programs and policies should be strengthened to be explicitly based on sustainability and integrate the following three core values:

- *Global Context*: The Region's role in contributing towards overall global sustainability

- *Sustainable Development*: An explicit theme integrated into all Regional programs and decision-making processes.
- *Leadership*: The Region as a best practice example of sustainable development planning in Canada in terms of policy and investment.

This overall perspective forms the context and direction for the TSYR Advisory Group's advice on a more sustainable *Regional Official Plan* and Sustainable Infrastructure Strategy as following sections summarize.

4.2 Advice on a More Sustainable Regional Official Plan

The following themes received considerable support throughout the TSYR Advisory Group's discussions and forms the basis on how to make the *Regional Official Plan* a more sustainable plan as summarized below:

- *Natural Environment*: Invest in protecting, enhancing and restoring the Region's extensive greenlands systems, aquifers and kettle lakes using a "quality not quantity" approach. Increase the land securement reserve above \$1.4 million per annum to facilitate this objective.
- *Infrastructure*: Emphasize GTAH-wide public transit system, provide bicycle and walking paths and utilize green construction techniques. Use individual Environmental Assessments for major projects and group projects together to assess total impact.
- *Water Conservation*: Develop a broad water strategy that includes water budgeting, river restoration, a comprehensive groundwater database, storm water quality and surface permeability standards for new development. Play a key role in Source Water Protection Plans.
- *Economic Vitality*: Promote the Region as a "campus" of innovation to encourage private and "sustainable" investment, local food production, and efficient movement of goods. Match job types to the skills of the resident labour force.
- *Energy*: Partner with energy providers to develop and export renewable energy sources in the Region. Work to include a wide range of energy efficient technologies and standards in homes and businesses.
- *Intensification*: Petition the Province for more effective tools and "as a right" pre-zoning in Centres and Corridors to achieve 40% intensification. Hold design charrettes to ensure that the 60% greenfield development is transit-supportive and mixed-use with multi-storey retail/commercial uses.

- *Social/Cultural*: Strengthen cultural heritage policies by recognizing and curating the Region's heritage, including our Aboriginal heritage, and highlighting human health issues, such as exposure to toxins and youth obesity.
- *Implementation and Measuring Success*: Develop clear targets to measure success along the triple-bottom line and report regularly to the public and stakeholders on progress.
- *Public and Stakeholder Engagement*: Develop a sustainable development communication plan that utilizes the internet and has an outreach program for youths.

A detailed explanation of these themes and a complete listing of the Advice for a more sustainable *Regional Official Plan* are included in this staff report as *Attachment 1*.

4.3 Advice on a Sustainable Infrastructure Strategy

The TSYR Advisory Group identifies the following themes that could inform the Infrastructure Master Plan Updates.

- A comprehensive natural environment system should be the starting point for infrastructure master planning
- Have a strategic approach to infrastructure (i.e. water, wastewater, transit and transportation) to minimize long-term impacts on the natural heritage system and match compact development principles.
- All Master Plans should be done in conjunction with land-use planning and recognize the linked natural heritage system.
- Advocate the Province for a clear multi-year Infrastructure and Capital Plan to set the stage for planning and implementing the municipal infrastructure system.
- Employ green standards and construction techniques to foster innovation and improve air and water quality.
- Engage in a full open dialogue with the public stressing Regional commitment to protecting natural environment while servicing growth.

4.4 TSYR Advisory Group Key Recommendations

The TSYR Advisory Group recognizes that the road to sustainability requires the Corporation to review its existing approaches and decision-making processes in order to move forward on this journey. To facilitate this analysis, some of the recommendations in the TSYR final report could be implemented relatively quickly, while many will have to be operationalized over the medium- to long-term.

Of all the recommendations contained in the final report, the following abbreviated “Seven Key Recommendations” represent the group’s key priorities for short-term implementation pending Regional Council’s endorsement:

1. Complete a linked Natural Heritage System in consultation with local municipalities and Conservation Authorities.
2. Build on a sustainable development theme in the growth management review which will update the *Regional Official Plan* review and Infrastructure Master Plans.
3. Consider the establishment of an “Office of Progress Towards Sustainability” that provides advice towards achieving *Regional Official Plan* objectives.
4. Improve on sustainability monitoring and reporting.
5. Strengthen sustainability dialogue with informal meetings between Regional partners and Senior Management.
6. Commit to becoming a leader in sustainability-based governance and decision-making.
7. Undertake triple-bottom line assessments for the TSYR Advisory Group’s key recommendations.

The complete description of the seven key recommendations is included in the staff report as *Attachment 1*.

As a sign of the Region’s commitment to TSYR’s advice and the overall progress in sustainability, the Region is currently taking steps to address some of these 7 key recommendations:

- The Region hosted a “Towards a Sustainable Region” Symposium on March 3rd at the Kortright Centre for Conservation in order to strengthen the dialogue with our stakeholders and public. Following this event, are a series of public meetings, panel discussions and focus groups that further engage our public at the community level of growth management.
- The concept of sustainability, long-term planning and public engagement are the themes for the update to the Region’s Growth Management Strategy and ROP.
- Sustainability is a key theme for the Infrastructure Master Plan Updates (water, wastewater, transit, roads and bicycle plans).

- The Region has recently completed the “Significant Woodlands Study” which will help define a more linked natural heritage system.
- Through the Greening Strategy, the Region has secured approximately 235 ha of natural heritage lands and Regional Council has approved an annual \$1.4 million securement reserve fund to acquire additional greenlands.
- In April 2006, Regional Council approved a minimum sustainable design and construction standard of LEED™ Silver for new Regional facilities over 500 m².
- The Region’s Vision 2026 initiative has explicitly integrated the theme of sustainability into its “Indicators of Progress” annual reports.

4.5 Regional Next Steps

The TSYR Advisory Group process represents a component of the *York Region Sustainability Initiative*. The findings contained in the final report will be compiled with the public feedback generated from the March 3rd “Towards a Sustainable Region” Symposium, and the growth management public meetings and focus groups taking place from May to June 2006. This accumulation of ideas and suggestions will inform the *Regional Official Plan* Review and Growth Management Strategy Update. Similarly, the feedback will feed directly into the Infrastructure Master Plan Updates for water, wastewater, transit and transportation.

In addition to the *Regional Official Plan* review and Master Plan updates, Regional staff will use the TSYR group’s advice to pursue other opportunities specific to the *York Region Sustainability Initiative*. These include:

- Fostering a corporate sustainability approach in Regional initiatives and decision-making that includes a triple bottom-line assessment to all Regional initiatives.
- Establishing sustainability criteria, procedures and an awareness program in the Corporation;
- Working with stakeholders and partners to pursue sustainability initiatives;
- Conducting a design charrette on sustainable greenfield development with the development industry, environmental sector, conservation authorities, human services sector and other key Regional stakeholders and partners;
- Reconvening some form of the TSYR advisory group on a regular basis in order to report back on progress made towards sustainability and to receive feedback on next steps;

- Identifying resource requirements to pursue sustainability strategies and a business case for a potential “Office of Sustainability” in York Region; and,
- Reporting back to Regional Council in the Fall of 2006 with a proposed work plan to carry out a York Region Sustainability Strategy.

4.6 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.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The TSYR process and action items to date have been completed using the existing staff complement. Additional related work may have budget and staff implications which would be subject to further consideration by Committee and Council in subsequent staff reports.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Senior staff and elected officials from the area municipalities attended the “*Towards a Sustainable Region*” Symposium. Area municipalities will continue to be fully informed on the collective advice of the TSYR Advisory Group and consulted on its implementation as a requirement of the York Region Sustainability Initiative, the Growth Management Review and the Infrastructure Master Plans Update.

7. CONCLUSION

It is the goal of the TSYR Advisory Group to provide the Region with advice that equally emphasizes economic, social and environmental values at the front-end of Regional processes and decision-making. The advice presented in this staff report will feed into the *Regional Official Plan* review, Master Plan Updates, future public engagement and collaboration opportunities, and provide further insight on how the concept of sustainability can be operationalized across the Region and within the Corporation. This stage can be attained by fostering a corporate sustainability approach, as well as ensuring that triple-bottom line assessments are conducted for Regional initiatives. These series of steps will ultimately augment the understanding of the concept, importance and implementation of sustainability principles across the Region and within the Corporation.

The completion of the *Towards Sustainability in York Region Advisory Group* meetings and final report of collective advice for a more sustainable *Regional Official Plan* and Infrastructure Strategy represents one of the first steps in the Region's journey towards forging a legacy as a sustainability champion. It is important to note that, although the TSYR advice may be short of detail, priority-setting timelines and implementation strategies, it successfully and explicitly defines a high-level vision and direction to long-term growth management for the Region using a sustainability lens.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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