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GROWTH MANAGEMENT PUBLIC INFORMATION AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS – STATUS UPDATE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Barbara Jeffrey, Manager of Land Use Policy and Environment, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendation contained in the following report, June 1, 2006, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that staff be directed to report back to Committee and Council in the fall with the final results of the Phase 1 consultation.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to advise Committee and Council of the results of the public information consultations to date on the Region's Growth Management Initiative.

3. BACKGROUND

Regional Council at its meeting of December 15, 2005 endorsed Clause 2 of Report 10 of the Regional Planning and Economic Development Department which reported on the status of Growth Management workplan components and outlined the public information and engagement program for the balance of 2006. Since that time, Regional staff has pursued the work plan as outlined and is pleased to provide this status update of progress.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

As indicated in the December report, the Planning for Tomorrow Growth Management public information and engagement process was designed to provide multiple opportunities for the public to:

- become informed about growth management in the Region
- discuss the issues
- raise new issues for consideration.

This discussion will assist Regional staff and Council in framing the questions and developing options for future decision making related to growth management and a sustainable Region.

4.1 Status Of Public Information And Engagement Opportunities

The December 2005 staff report identified the following public information and engagement opportunities:

- Sustainable Development Symposium
- Stakeholder Workshops
- Information Kit Development and Publication
- Community-Based Town Hall meetings
- Stakeholder Contact Lists
- Website Consultation
- Partnering
- Technical Advisory Committee's

4.1.1 Sustainable Development Symposium

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 generate ideas for sustainable growth management in York Region. Regional Planning Committee received a detailed report of this symposium at its May 10, 2006 meeting.

4.1.2 Stakeholder Workshops

Meetings have now been held with a number of special interest groups throughout the Region including:

- Regional Agricultural Liaison Committee – April 13, 2006
- Human Services Planning Coalition – April 19, 2006
- Cultural Planning Workshop – May 10, 2006
- Urban Development Institute, York Chapter – General Meeting May 19, and a UDI Workshop May 24, 2006
- Environmental Groups, including EAC representatives – May 25, 2006
- Regional High School classes – April 10, 2006 and late May, 2006

As well Regional staff was invited to attend, present and discuss the Growth Management initiative with Councils of the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Whitchurch-Stouffville. In this latter case there was discussion and comments received which are included in *Attachment 4* to this report.

A summary of the issues raised at these meetings is included within Section 4.2 of this report.

4.1.3 Information Kit Development and Publication

Prior to the Community based Public meetings, regional staff produced the *Planning for Tomorrow* pamphlet designed to provide information and stimulate discussion for the sessions. The pamphlet was circulated to 1600 people on our contact list and distributed at all Town Hall and Stakeholder meetings.

4.1.4 Community Based Town Hall Meetings

Starting in March and continuing to mid-April, five public information sessions and discussions were held in the Region's four Regional Centres and in the Town of Georgina. In addition, each of the Community based meetings provided further information to attendees on aspects of the Region's programs including:

- Water for Tomorrow
- VIVA .York Region Transit
- Background Information on Water and Sewer Infrastructure projects
- State of the Environment
- Vision 2026

The sessions were well attended with a total of 319 persons signing in, and the range and quality of the discussions was excellent. Summaries of the main discussion points have been posted on the Region's *Planning for Tomorrow* website and appended as *Attachment 3* to this report. The main issues are summarized below by issue area in Section 4.2.

4.1.4.1 Written Responses Received to Date

In addition to comments delivered at public information sessions, a number of our stakeholders provided written comments by Email or surface delivery to supplement their input at the meetings or provide additional thoughts and recommendations. *Attachment 1* to this report provides a summary of the written comments received in matrix form with an analysis of the issue area. *Attachment 1 - Part 2* contains copies of all the submissions received to date. In addition to these submissions, a number of individuals, companies and planning consultants have also requested to be added to our mailing lists to ensure they are kept informed of the process.

4.1.5 Stakeholder Contact List

The stakeholder contact list now contains some 1700 names, addresses and in many cases Email addresses. This list is under constant revision as new contacts are added, information changed or refined and contacts removed.

This contact list has been used to undertake on-going notice for the public information sessions and will continue to be used to advise stakeholders of ongoing activities, including the presentation of this report to Committee and Council.

4.1.6 Website Consultation

The *Planning for Tomorrow* website contains background information to the initiative, the results of the Sustainability Symposium as well as the presentations made by the

speakers, information relating to the date time and location of each of the Public meetings and the Summary Notes from each sessions and a feedback and contact form.

The *Planning for Tomorrow* website had just over 1,000 visits in March and 1,100 in April by people tracking what was happening or being said through the growth management process. Fourteen individuals also filled in the online questionnaire and their feedback has also been included in the summary of comments document *Attachment 1*.

4.1.7 Partnering

The Region successfully partnered with the York Region News Group to produce a six-part series of articles on topics relating to Growth Management. These included:

- Planning for Growth
- Economies of Growth
- Growing Green
- Healthy Communities
- Liveable Lifestyles
- Getting Around

The articles appeared before and during the Public information sessions and assisted in raising the profile of the growth initiative issues facing the Region. Copies of the articles are appended to this report as *Attachment 2*. The York Region newsgroup also has provided a link and coverage of the growth management initiative on their website at <http://www.yorkregion.com/yr/yr4/APlaceToGrow>

In addition to this, Mayor James Young, Chair of the Planning and Economic Development Committee and Senior staff provided a number of print and televised media interviews responding to questions received.

4.1.8 Technical Advisory Committee's

A technical working group committee was formed with staff representation from the local municipalities. An initial meeting was held on January 24, 2005, to brief local municipal planners on the background forecast report prepared for the Provincial *Draft Growth Plan*. Subsequent meetings were held throughout 2005 with local municipal staff to provide updates on progress of the workplan components. Further meetings will be held throughout 2006 and 2007 as work progresses on the forecasts, land inventory, land budget and other growth management work.

4.2 Summary Of Issues To Date

The public information sessions, written comments received and the interest group sessions have provided valuable input for Regional staff and Council to assist in framing and discussing issues and challenges.

A number of issue areas were presented at the Town Hall meetings and highlighted in the *Planning for Tomorrow* brochure:

- Growth
- Environment
- Economy
- Intensification
- Human Services, quality of Life
- Infrastructure
- Moving York
- Quality of Place

Summary feedback from the Town Hall meetings and stakeholder workshops are available on the Region's website as *Planning for Tomorrow*. A preliminary summary of messages heard in these meetings includes:

- Some concern that the Provincial Growth Forecasts for 2031 are too high for York Region.
- We must provide greater protection for our natural heritage.
- Need to ensure availability of future employment lands and opportunities.
- Need to add protection of agricultural lands and the agricultural industry for food production as an issue.
- Need to recognize the links between a strong economy and housing and transportation.
- Culture, heritage and good design are essential to our communities.
- Must consider energy use and conservation in the planning process.
- Need to reduce our ecological footprint.
- The Region should recognize the value of our "natural capital" and the carrying-capacity of the land - this should be the driver in deciding how much growth should occur in the Region.
- Traffic congestion is a major issue across the entire region and must be addressed, however, transit is extremely important and should be routed to match travel patterns.
- We must ensure that human services keep pace with growth.
- It is important to ensure that development does not get ahead of infrastructure investment.
- We must ensure protection of the Lake Simcoe watershed.
- We need to protect all of our water resources - both ground and surface water systems and consider these systems in our infrastructure planning.
- There is a need to make more sustainable growth management decisions.
- Intensification needs to be done carefully.
- The Region has a potential leadership role in communicating how growth management can be achieved in a sustainable manner.

Over the balance of the summer, these issues will be considered and discussed by Regional, Provincial and area municipal staff and a further report brought back in the fall of 2006 for consideration, however there are several key messages that Committee and Council need to be aware of at this time:

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 concern expressed with how fast growth has occurred in the past and may occur in the future, whether our human services, transit and transportation systems and water and sewer services can keep pace with the growth and how our natural areas (natural capital) can continue to be protected. Some stakeholders felt that York Region should consider taking a hiatus from growth until we resolve current problems or that growth should go elsewhere.

Natural Heritage

Protection and investment in a linked natural heritage system remains a strong concern for the majority of York Region residents. Included within this wider issue is concern over Lake Simcoe and ground and surface water resources.

Intensification

Intensification needs to be done carefully to ensure it is the right location, fits with surrounding uses and is high quality design.

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.

Agricultural Lands

The GTA Agricultural Action Plan outlines some 37 recommendations to assist in ensuring that Agriculture remains a viable industry within the GTA. In York Region with approximately 69% of the land area within the Greenbelt (including the ORMCP portion) much of the land area has been protected, however challenges relating to taxation and farmland assessment and diversification of the industry among others remain outstanding.

Sustainability

Many people and organizations expressed concern 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. The final report of the Towards Sustainability in York Region Group (TSYR) makes recommendations to move the Region more clearly to this viewpoint.

4.3 Next Steps

Regional staff is continuing to work on the technical background studies identified in the workplan of November 2005 and further reports will be forthcoming in the fall of 2006.

Regional staff will continue to meet with stakeholders over the summer to discuss issues and address questions. A further report on the Phase 1 consultation will be brought

forward in the fall for the consideration of Planning and Economic Development Committee.

In addition to this, Regional staff continues to await the release of the Growth Plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe - Places to Grow to determine its impact on future growth and the form of development in York Region. This Provincial Plan will have implications to the Region's growth management work on the land budgeting being carried out at the present time.

4.4 Relationship To Vision 2026

The growth management public information and engagement process continues to support Vision 2026 through all of its goal areas:

- Quality communities for a diverse population
- Enhanced environment, heritage and culture
- A vibrant economy
- Responding to the needs of our residents
- Housing choice for our residents
- Managed and balance growth
- Infrastructure for a growing Region
- Engaged communities and a responsive Region

This information and engagement process will assist regional staff and Council in decision making that continues to support Vision 2026 into the future. It's through such efforts as this, involving the public, Regional Council and staff, that Vision 2026 comes to life and is implemented.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Phase 1 of the public information and consultation work is being undertaken within the existing staff complement and 2006 approved budget of the Planning Department.

Further phases of the workplan will be funded through the 2007 and subsequent budgets.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Regional staff is working with local municipalities in the growth management and public information and engagement process. The Town Hall staff presentation and issues list was developed with area municipal staff input. The Growth Management presentation had been made to East Gwillimbury and Whitchurch-Stouffville Councils. Staff would be pleased to present to other area municipal Councils at their request. Local municipal staff will have many more opportunities for future collaboration in order to communicate and implement the findings and options arising from this process.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Phase 1 Growth Management consultations are on-going and are providing important information to assist staff and Council in identifying and framing the issues for the future. Continuing dialogue will be necessary as we move forward.

A great deal of consultation has been undertaken. The Sustainable Development Symposium, five Town Hall meetings and the follow-up stakeholder and focus group meetings have been well attended. Over 3000 households received the first mail out of growth management information and subsequently over 300 people registered at the Town Hall meetings. Our contact list has grown to nearly 1700 people and the Email contact list is nearly 900 individuals and organizations. The web site continues to be a tool some individuals are using to keep up with what is happening in the process.

- Sustainable Development Symposium
- Stakeholder Workshops
- Information Kit Development and Publication
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Next steps include further focus on stakeholder meetings and continuing dialogue, and completion of technical background studies.

A more complete report on the public engagement consultation will be brought back for the consideration of Committee and Council in the fall of 2006.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachments referred to in this clause were included in the agenda for the June 14, 2006 Committee meeting.)