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TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY IN YORK REGION ADVISORY GROUP

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 24, 2005, from the Chief Administrative Officer:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse the stakeholder discussions of the *Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group*.
2. The advice and suggestions resulting from this Advisory Group be reported back to Regional Council for review.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is to introduce Committee and Council to the process and discussions of the TSYR Advisory Group.

3. BACKGROUND

The TSYR Advisory Group, composed of representatives from the environmental sector, development industry and public environmental sector was established for several reasons as described below:

- In September 2004 a preliminary meeting of stakeholders was held to explore the potential of establishing an on-going dialoge on growth management and infrastructure issues.
- In October 2004, in 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.”
- Over the last year issues have been raised by various environmental groups and other stakeholders regarding infrastructure initiatives such as the 16th Avenue and 19th Avenue Sewer projects.
- A second meeting of the TSYR Advisory group was held on July 21, 2005 to discuss the process and how the resulting advice would be used.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Mandate and Structure of the TSYR

It is proposed that the TSYR Advisory Group work at two levels by:

- Providing advice to the Region on how to make the Regional Official Plan a more “Sustainable Regional” Plan, including next steps.
- Providing advice to the Region on the development of a “Sustainable Infrastructure Strategy”, including next steps.

The members of the TSYR Advisory Group are:

- Regional Municipality of York – Michael Garrett as Chair
- Greater Toronto Home Builders Association
- Environmental Defence Canada
- Urban Development Institute
- Ontario Nature
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
- Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority
- Staff of the Ministry of the Environment as observers

To facilitate and coordinate the TSYR Advisory Group discussions and process, the Region has engaged two respected consultants. Dr. David V. J. Bell will act as the Facilitator for the Advisory Group. Dr. Bell is a Professor Emeritus, Senior Scholar and Former Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. Dr. Bell was a founding member of the International Sustainability Indicators Network and the Toronto Sustainability Roundtable. He currently serves on the National Round Table of the Environment and Economy (NRTEE) and the Toronto Sustainability Round Table. Coordination activities for the group will be undertaken by Mr. Craig Mather, P. Eng. former CAO of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Staff of the Long Range and Strategic Planning Branch of the Planning Department will provide staff support to the Advisory Group.

4.2 Advisory Group Products

In terms of products, the Region would look to the Advisory Group for:

- *Product 1:* Advice on the development of a high level and long range approach for moving the Region towards a sustainable development strategy. The answers to the following questions may provide a framework for our discussions:
 - What components of the current Regional Official Plan support a Sustainable York Region?
 - What components are missing? (i.e. energy, climate change etc.)
 - What might success look like and how would it be measured?

- What are the next steps the Region needs to take action on the Group's advice?
- *Product 2*: A framework, including objectives, principles and best management practices which would form the basis of a sustainable infrastructure strategy providing for:
 - Ground and Surface Water Protection;
 - Natural Heritage Protection;
 - Human Health Needs;
 - Financial Considerations;
 - Growth Needs, considering *the Draft Provincial Growth Plan*; and,
 - Next Steps.

4.3 Proposed Advisory Group Process and Timelines

It is proposed that there be six sessions of the TSYR Advisory Group facilitated by Dr. David V. J. Bell. The timeline for these sessions are outlined below:

- An informal session with all participants to discuss the process - July 21, 2005
- First formal session – early September
- Next sessions will occur approximately every 3 weeks
- Last session of final report - December 2005/ January 2006
- An extra 1-2 sessions may be added if required.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs to fund this Advisory Group are not anticipated to exceed \$75,000, which can be accommodated within the 2005 and 2006 Capital budget. No additional allocation of funds is required.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities will be consulted during the process and the products of the Advisory Committee will be provided to them for information.

7. CONCLUSION

York Region has been successful in conceptualizing and implementing sustainable development with such initiatives as our Oak Ridge Moraine and Greenbelt initiatives, VIVA Rapid Transit, The Greening Strategy, Water for Tomorrow Program, and the Regional Official Plan among others. Sustainable Development is a key theme of the ongoing growth management work.

The *Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group* represents an effective mechanism, using stakeholder consultation and engagement, to move forward to improve the Region's efforts to become a best practice example of sustainable development in Canada.

A dialogue with these key stakeholders gives a better understanding of various perspectives, provides a longer term strategy for growth management and infrastructure planning that will help avoid project by project conflict.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.