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YORK REGION SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE AND PROPOSED WORKPLAN

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 recommendation contained in the following report, September 21, 2005, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse the proposed workplan for a Sustainable Development Initiative for York Region.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide a Sustainable Development Primer to assist in understanding the definition, meaning and importance of the sustainable development concept. “*The Primer for a Sustainable York Region*” is included as *Attachment 1* and forms the basis for this staff report.
- Propose a high level workplan for moving the Corporation forward to a more sustainable Region, including the incorporation of a sustainable development theme into the ongoing and future Growth Management workplan.

3. BACKGROUND

The Region has a number of significant growth related issues over the next few years including: congestion, creating centres and corridors, provision of appropriate human services, environmental protection and nurturing a vital economy. The Region has also encountered public and stakeholder reaction to some infrastructure initiatives and concerns regarding the pace of growth.

The Region is also affected by emerging global issues including: climate change, loss of nature-biodiversity, social equity, the need balance growth, economic prosperity and fiscal efficiency. The holistic nature of the sustainable development model can assist the

Region in meeting and balancing the challenges these global issues will present in the future.

From a timing perspective, there appears to be political alignment and consensus in support of sustainable development thinking and practices at the federal, provincial and regional levels of government as follows:

Federal Government Direction

The Federal Government signed the Kyoto Protocol on April 29, 1998. The *Kyoto Protocol Agreement* and the *New Deal for Cities and Communities* prioritize the issue of sustainable development on the Federal Government's political agenda. The Minister of Infrastructure and Renewal, John Godfrey, explained on June 10, 2005 that his Ministry will award gas tax funding to municipalities that undertake sustainability projects in the areas of public transit, clean water, wastewater, waste management and energy. He further explained that gas tax funding will be tied to a community sustainability plan that offers an integrated strategy on how these projects will be achieved and evaluated.

Provincial Government Direction

The Provincial Government's Smart Growth Principles, the *Greenbelt Plan* and the *Places to Grow, Draft Growth Plan*, appear to align with the notion of sustainable development, although the term is not explicitly used in the corresponding discussions, policies and programs.

The Provincial Policy Statement Section 1.8.1(e) states that: "*Planning authorities shall support energy efficiency and improved air quality through land-use and development patterns which: promote design and orientation which maximize the use of alternative or renewable energy, such as solar and wind energy and the mitigating effects of vegetation*".

Towards Sustainability in York Region (TYSR) Advisory Group

Recent issues raised by the public and other stakeholders regarding various Regional infrastructure projects, have highlighted the need to find a new and innovative approach to implementation and public engagement and awareness strategies.

In a letter dated October 1, 2004, former Provincial Minister of the Environment, Leona Dombrowsky, commended the Region for its commitment to the Ministry of the Environment 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."

Regional Council at its meeting of September, 22, 2005 endorsed the stakeholder discussions of the *Towards Sustainability in York Region Advisory Group*. The purpose of these stakeholder discussions is to:

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

Regional Chair Fisch, in a speech to AMO on August 16, 2005, has also discussed the concepts and history of sustainable development and the Region’s actions in moving to achieve sustainable development principles. Chair Fisch’s presentation is appended to this report as *Attachment 3*

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Although the Region does not directly use the words “sustainable development” or “sustainability” in its strategic planning documents, the notion of triple-bottom line sustainability is integrated into many of the Region’s policy documents. The following section outlines how the policy framework of the Region’s primary strategic documents captures the basis of sustainable development theory.

4.1 Sustainable Development – A Definition

In 1987, the United Nations, through the Brundtland Commission, defined sustainable development as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*” The goal of sustainable development is to integrate and balance the three elements of environmental protection, economic growth and social equity. The basis of sustainable development theory is about legacy in which we strive to answer the question: “what type of world do we want to leave for our children and grand-children?”

4.1.1 Triple Bottom-Line Sustainability

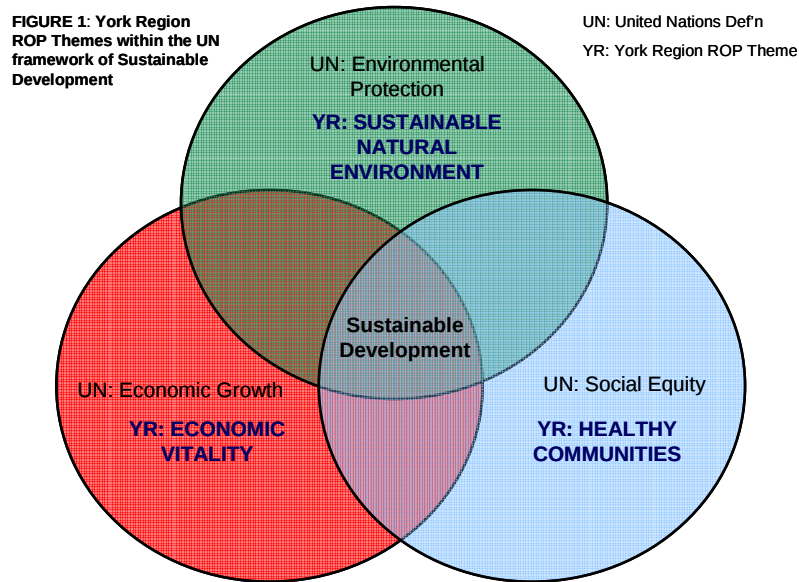
Solutions to growth and development challenges that simultaneously create economic, environmental and social value and benefit are referred to as “triple bottom-line sustainability”. An example of triple bottom-line sustainability would be public transit in that it achieves the following sustainable development objectives.

Environmental benefit:	Rapid transit reduces greenhouse gas emissions attributed to carbon dioxide from automobile usage.
Social benefit:	Rapid transit ensures that all segments of the population and labour force have access to efficient, affordable and quality transportation.
Economic benefit:	Rapid Transit ensures a higher and more efficient movement of goods and people by reducing automobile congestion.

4.2 Current Regional Direction

4.2.1 Regional Official Plan

The main objective and structure of the *Regional Official Plan (ROP)* focuses on interconnecting the three themes of *Sustainable Natural Environment*, *Economic Vitality* and *Healthy Communities* - which are the three elements of sustainable development according to the United Nations framework. This is illustrated below in Figure 1.



4.2.2 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 and process calls for engagement and interaction between the public, all relevant stakeholders and Regional Staff. Educational and awareness campaigns are promoted and are implemented with much success. Moreover, a monitoring system and documentation are in place for annual performance evaluations.

Vision 2026 is an excellent example of how the legacy component of sustainable development is captured in policy because the document and process address the United Nations definition of sustainable development.

4.2.3 Growth Management Workplan

Regional Staff are currently undertaking a comprehensive examination of our Growth Management approach. This work will address key policy issues that the Region faces including: the pace of growth, intensification, implementing the Centres & Corridors Strategy, providing for a vibrant economy, and implementing our natural environmental policies.

The Sustainable Development concept provides a useful perspective or lens through which to view these difficult growth issues. Sustainable Development principles also advocate a vigorous public discussion of issues so as to arrive at community based approaches and solutions.

4.3 Regional Successes

The Region has undertaken many successful initiatives that demonstrate in action, “how” the Region strives to achieve sustainable development. Many of these initiatives are on the leading edge of governmental policy within the GTA, such as the *Centres and Corridors Strategy*, and many have won recognized national and international awards such as the *Water for Tomorrow Program*. Regional successes include, but are not limited to:

- Centres and Corridors Strategy
- Oak Ridges Moraine and Greening Strategy Initiatives
- Water for Tomorrow Program
- York Region Transit (YRT) and Rapid Transit (VIVA)
- Human Services Plan
- State of the Environment Report
- Corporate Clean Air Task Force
- Housing Strategy
- Smart Commute Initiative
- Wind Energy Studies
- Building Energy Feasibility Study
- Energy and Environmental Management System (EEMS)

4.4 Sustainable Development: A Way of Thinking

The process for attaining sustainable development is equal in importance as the goals and actions themselves. The concept is a holistic and cyclical thought process that emphasizes public involvement, monitoring and continuous improvement towards sustainability rather than producing a one-time document or engaging in a one-time exercise.

According to the United Nations, the cornerstones of a sustainable development way of thinking are transparency, equity, accountability and community involvement.

Staff is currently compiling an inventory of international and national best practice examples. The examples offer more direct comparisons to the situation and political reality in York Region. Within all of these examples are defining common elements that include:

- Achieving triple bottom-line sustainability
- Engaging and informing the public on policy and process
- Taking a long-term outlook typically beyond a 20-year planning horizon
- Ensuring a transparent and accountable process

The Region does achieve sustainable development principles in many policy documents and initiatives. As a result, there is an opportunity to take the Region to a higher level by ensuring that sustainable development considerations are present in all Regional policy and programs, in addition to those mentioned in this report. This objective can be attained by:

1. Continuing to operationalize these policies in Regional program implementation and corporate decision-making and operations.
2. Consolidating and formalizing existing and future sustainable development initiatives into one policy umbrella for further implementation as part of a sustainable development initiative for York Region.

In 2002, as a means of operationalizing sustainable development principles for local government, the United Nations, in partnership with the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), developed a series of guiding *statements*, called the *Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities*. These principles offer further insight and provide a foundation for sustainable urban development. They are appended as *Attachment 2* to this report.

4.5 Next Steps: Opportunities to Improve Sustainable Development Considerations Across the Region

There is an opportunity to build on the strong Regional policy framework to become a more sustainable Region. It is evident that the Region is on the right path towards sustainable development; however there is an opportunity to improve in some core areas, which include, but are not limited to:

- Infrastructure and Human Services Implementation
- Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Sources (i.e. cleaner fuel sources for regional fleets)
- Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Green Infrastructure Investment and Marketing
- Corporate Decision-Making Process
- Approach to Public and Stakeholder Awareness and Engagement Strategies

4.6 Regional Sustainable Development Initiative: Proposed Workplan

Given the direction of the Federal and Provincial governments and the basic concept of sustainability, there are considerable reasons for the Region to further incorporate sustainable development thinking into its operations, practices and approach to public awareness and engagement. This section proposes a workplan for a *Sustainable Development Initiative* for the Region that includes the following potential actions:

1. **Incorporate a sustainable development theme into the Growth Management Workplan to be used as part of an extensive public consultation on growth issues.**

Sustainable development principles provide an innovative approach to a long-term growth strategy that focuses on creating environmental, economic and social value on a region-wide basis. Area municipalities will especially be consulted as a required component of this workplan. While sustainable development concepts are implicit in a number of our strategic documents, the concept must be made explicit in our language and more importantly in the Region's programs and operations, subject to budget approvals. In order to do this, it will be necessary to develop criteria or principles – such as the Melbourne Principles (*see Attachment 2*) that are “*made in York*” to assess our progress. This step could include producing a stand alone public document illustrating the Region's approach to sustainable development as part of a communication strategy.

2. Undertake a focused review of York Region policies, programs and operations to assess compliance with sustainable development criteria.

A focused review could be undertaken by an external organization (such as ICLEI), a facilitator, or by Regional departments to assess the Region's policies, decision-making processes and operations against the *made in York* sustainable development criteria. A review of this nature and identification of gaps would assist the Region in designing future processes that fully implement sustainable development principles.

3. Continue the inventory and review of international and national best practice examples of sustainable development.

This inventory would assist the Region in keeping abreast of sustainable development initiatives from other local governments in Canada and around the world. This inventory represents one way of gauging where the Region stands with respect to innovative sustainability planning approaches.

4. Integrate the advice of the *Towards Sustainability in York Region* Advisory Group.

Integrating the advice of the TSYR Advisory Group not only fulfills the Province's expectation and has been endorsed by Council, but demonstrates a Regional commitment to review and improve its practices to the Region's stakeholders.

5. Engage in a Corporate and Community Wide Awareness Initiative to ensure information is shared about the meaning and importance of Sustainable Development to the Region.

Education and information sharing among Regional staff, political representatives, local counterparts and other stakeholders in the Region is an important and ongoing effort. The production of the *Primer on Sustainable Development (Attachment 1)* is a useful first step, however additional education opportunities will also be investigated. In addition as previously indicated, the public consultation plan for the growth management work is intended to be a wide ranging, comprehensive engagement of the public on matters

related to growth and future development. Further reports to Council and Committee will be brought forward to articulate these proposals.

4.7 Relationship to Vision 2026

The intent of this staff report and the proposed workplan for a more sustainable Region is consistent with all goal areas and objectives of Vision 2026.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposed sustainable development initiative potential actions can likely be completed using the existing staff complement. Additional related work, such as enhanced public consultation, may have budget and staffing implications, which would be subject to further consideration by Committee and Council in subsequent reports.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Area municipalities will be fully consulted and engaged in the York Region Sustainable Development Initiative.

7. CONCLUSION

The Region has been successful with such sustainable development initiatives as the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt initiatives, VIVA Rapid Transit, the Centres and Corridors Strategy and the Water for Tomorrow Program. Implementing the proposed workplan for a *Regional Sustainable Development Initiative* presented in this staff report would consolidate and formalize existing and future sustainable initiatives under one policy umbrella. A major first step in implementing a successful sustainable development initiative would be to integrate a sustainable development theme into the Growth Management Workplan.

This approach will position the Region as a leader in sustainable development and is in sync with the Federal grants initiative to implement the Kyoto protocol on sustainable development.

Adopting a sustainable way of thinking across the Region would involve taking a comprehensive and innovative approach to long-term growth management, infrastructure and human services implementation and public awareness and engagement that will help avoid project by project conflict.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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