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YORK REGION SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY - FINAL VERSION

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated October 31, 2007, from the Chief Administrative Officer:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council adopt the final version of the *York Region Sustainability Strategy: Towards a Sustainable Region (Attachment 1)*.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate the final version of the Sustainability Strategy to all Area Municipalities and the Provincial Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Public Infrastructure Renewal, Environment, Natural Resources, Economic Development and Trade for their information and comment.
3. Staff be directed to proceed with implementation of the strategy action items and report back with specific action plans and progress reports.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is to:

1. Summarize the feedback received from Regional stakeholders, partners and the public on the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy.
2. Recommend that Regional Council adopt the final version of the York Region Sustainability Strategy (*Attachment 1*).

3. BACKGROUND

In March 2007, Council endorsed the *York Region Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy: Towards a Sustainable Region* and directed Regional staff to consult with stakeholders and report back with a final Sustainability Strategy. This section highlights the fundamental components of the strategy and its function within the Corporation.



The preliminary draft strategy is based on input from Regional stakeholders, partners and members of the public. Consultation forums included:

- The York Region “*Towards a Sustainable Region*” Symposium held at the Kortright Centre for Conservation in Vaughan on March 3, 2006. Approximately, 150 Regional

stakeholders attended from such diverse industry sectors as government, business, human services and the environment. Council received the results of the symposium in May 2006.

- The *Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group* provided recommendations on how the Region could make the *Regional Official Plan* more sustainable and how to develop a Sustainable Infrastructure Plan. The Advisory Group was comprised of representatives from various environmental organizations, the conservation authorities and the development industry. Council received their final report in June 2006.
- Several public meetings and focus groups were held as part of Phase I and II of the *Planning for Tomorrow* Initiative. Council received the most recent staff report on the results in September 2007.

3.1 What is the Purpose of the Sustainability Strategy?

The purpose of the Sustainability Strategy is to provide a long-term framework for making smarter decisions, not only about growth management, but all municipal responsibilities that integrate economic, environmental and community considerations. Other reasons include:

- Makes good business sense in terms of increasing competitive advantage, energizing employees and increasing productivity and efficiency.
- Translates the concept of sustainability into practical action.
- Aligns and coordinates current initiatives and identifies gaps.
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions and minimizes the effects of climate change through mitigation and adaptation.
- Addresses the expectation and values of our public, stakeholders and employees.
- Provides leadership to our public and in the provincial and national arenas.

3.2 What is the Function of Sustainability Strategy within the Corporation?

The Region has built a strong foundation for sustainability over the past 13 years with its two strategic documents, *Vision 2026* and the *Regional Official Plan*. The Region had a number of successes such as the Greening Strategy, the Human Services Planning Coalition, Viva Rapid Transit, and more recently, energy efficient affordable housing. The Sustainability Strategy is meant to further inform and improve all policies, programs and operations.



The strategy includes over 100 short-term actions and is based on increased awareness and partnerships to make more sustainable decisions.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

This section will summarize the results of the strategy's consultation phase which have been incorporated into the final version of the Sustainability Strategy.

4.1 Distribution and Consultation

The Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy was circulated to a number of diverse stakeholders across the Region, both internal and external. These included Regional employees, area municipalities, selected provincial ministries, environmental groups, human services providers, business and industry, and members of the public, among others. Regional and Local Councils, as well as Members of Provincial Parliament in York Region also received a copy of the preliminary draft.

To further strengthen engagement and awareness, staff held a multi-stakeholder focus group with invited environmental groups, human services providers and chamber of commerce representatives to obtain further input on the draft strategy. Staff also made presentations at a number of forums focussing on education, social services, infrastructure, and procurement. These include:

- Town of East Gwillimbury, Sustainability Community Forum
- York Region Employees (Lunch n' Learn and Leaders Sessions)
- Human Services Planning Coalition
- York Region Public and Catholic District Schools Boards
- Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA)
- York Region Public Buyers
- Ontario Centre for Environmental Technology Advancement (OCETA)
- York Region Water and Wastewater Branch
- University of Waterloo, Department of Environment and Resources
- Chinese Delegation on Sustainability

In addition, the Region retained *The Natural Step – Canada*¹ to provide suggestions how to strengthen the Sustainability Strategy and ensure successful implementation. As mentioned above, staff also discussed the draft strategy with a panel of professors from the University of Waterloo.

4.2 Stakeholder Feedback and Revisions to the Strategy

The public and regional employees support the overall intention, principles and action items contained in the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy. There are, however, a

¹ *The Natural Step Canada* is a registered national charitable organization based in Ottawa. This organization provides training, coaching and advice to business and municipal management teams on how to practically integrate sustainability principles into their strategies and operations. The Natural Step is active in ten other countries worldwide including Australia, Brazil, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, Italy and France.

number of revisions to clarify and strengthen several themes and to emphasize implementation.

Staff received area municipal feedback that has been incorporated into the revised strategy. These include:

- Town of Georgina Sustainability initiatives (pg 7):
 - Municipal Waste Reduction Initiatives
 - Willow Beach Water and Sewer Project,
 - Town-operated vehicles converted to bio-diesel.
- Correction to the Town of East Gwillimbury's LEED policy to require not only LEED silver for all new town facilities, but also for all new industrial, commercial, institutional and high-rise residential buildings (pg 7).
- Town of East Gwillimbury suggested additional actions under the theme of Sustainable Natural Environment (pg 18):
 - Investigate the possibility of establishing an emissions trading/carbon credit system for the Region
 - Expand on energy efficiency initiatives and pursue other forms of renewable energy (i.e. solar, wind)
 - Incorporate more initiatives that target the rural and agricultural sectors, such as programs that inform farmers about more sustainable farming techniques.
 - Explore and produce a comprehensive green building strategy in consultation with municipalities that would incorporate Energy Star and/or LEED Standards.

The following summarizes public feedback on the draft strategy which was both high level and specific in nature. This input has been incorporated into the final Sustainability Strategy for Council adoption, as described below.

Creating a Vision

The strategy needed to have a stronger and clearer vision of what constitutes a Sustainable York Region. As a result, a new section entitled "Creating a Vision" was added to the document to characterize success in sustainability planning. By having a clear vision, the Region can make more effective investments for our communities, citizens and the Corporation.

Human Services and Overall Community Perspective

There was general agreement to strengthen the community perspective of the Sustainability Strategy:

- Recognize that community strength and resilience involves inclusion/engagement of individuals, organizations and community groups.
- The health of a community is based on the social determinants of health such as the physical and social environment, health, employment, availability of housing, culture and education, among others.

- Update the Region's human services requirements and include a 25-year Human Services Fiscal Impact Study to align with the growth targets in the Provincial Growth Plan.

Food and Agriculture

The strategy could further support the local agricultural industry by adding the following action items:

- Supporting the GTA Agricultural Action Committee in implementing the GTA Agricultural Action Plan.
- Coordinating with the agricultural community to promote local production to local markets, retailers, restaurants and other related businesses.
- Investigating how community gardens can be incorporated into new subdivisions and into the existing urban fabric as a contributor to community health, social interactions, and security of local food supply.

Community Energy Planning

The Region could explore and adopt community energy planning and techniques to incorporate alternative and renewable energy sources. These techniques may include: energy conservation, district energy systems in industrial areas, building orientation for passive solar heat gain and community based ground source heat pump systems.

Education, Engagement and Partnerships

The Region is encouraged to continue innovative methods of public engagement and awareness to involve our diverse population. This includes:

- Collaborating with regional schools and the school boards to engage our young people in sustainability planning and processes.
- Partnering with various ethno-cultural groups.

Guiding Principles of Implementation

The Guiding Principles of Implementation have been revised to include the values of adaptation, prevention, stewardship, increased collaboration and shared responsibility. These revisions are based on discussions with stakeholders and sustainability experts, along with additional research. Incorporating these components into the principles better clarify the meaning of sustainability and how regional decision-making processes can be improved.

Implementation: Priority-Setting, Monitoring and Targets

One of the major suggestions from our feedback was to establish a structured implementation plan that includes:

- Priority actions for immediate implementation that will generate an early return on investment and provide momentum to commit to long-term improvements.
- Preparing an implementation matrix for all 100 actions including responsibility, timing and cost.

- Sustainability assessments for Regional decision-making processes that includes triple-bottom line evaluation, return on investment, and alignment with the guiding principles of implementation.
- Integrate sustainability values into the business plans for each regional business unit.

Staff conducted extensive consultation with a diverse cross-section of Regional stakeholders, partners and members of the public. The suggested revisions, as described above, further strengthen the strategy by addressing areas of improvement. Staff have incorporated all of these suggestions in a way to reflect the true nature of the public's comments. These comments identify the key issues that are important to the public and better clarify a sustainability vision for the Region. Adoption of the final Sustainability Strategy will enable implementation of this vision.

4.3 York Region Priority Actions

Based on the results of the consultation phase of the strategy, the Region developed a list of priority actions for implementation. These include:

1. *Complete Sustainable Infrastructure Master Plan Updates that are integrated with the Natural Heritage System and the Growth Management Strategy.*
2. *Provide incentives for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) developments in the Regional Centres and Corridors.*
3. *Update Regional Natural Heritage System policies.*
4. *Initiate a corporate dialogue on sustainability leadership and building a corporate culture of sustainability.*
5. *Establish a Sustainability Training Program for regional employees.*
6. *Require a sustainability assessment for regional decisions, major staff reports, and proposed sustainability strategy actions.*
7. *Establish a York Region Sustainability Internal Steering Committee to assist in the implementation, monitoring, resourcing and improvement of the Sustainability Strategy.*
8. *Develop an implementation plan for each action including specific steps, outcomes and responsibilities.*
9. *Integrate sustainability values into the business plans for each regional business unit.*
10. *Develop a mechanism to monitor greenhouse gas emissions corporate-wide.*
11. *Develop a sustainable purchase of service protocol and a green procurement strategy.*
12. *Prepare a business case for a proposed Sustainability Office within the Region.*

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

The eight goal areas of Vision 2026 speak to all the principles and values emphasized in the Sustainability Strategy. It is expected that the *Vision 2026 Annual Report on Indicators of Progress* will be streamlined to be the primary monitoring document.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications associated with the York Region Sustainability Strategy itself. The process is being undertaken within the existing staff complement and budget allocation for the Planning and Development Services Department and the Chief Administrative Officer's Office. A number of individual

initiatives and actions listed in the final version are already underway and accounted for in existing department business plans and budgets. The proposed action items not presently covered in approved budgets will each be subject to a stand alone report to Council on its financial implications and sustainability.

The cost of printing and distributing the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy was approximately \$5,000.00. A similar cost is estimated for the printing and distribution of the final strategy.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Area municipalities are already engaged in a number of progressive sustainability initiatives as outlined in *Attachment 1*. Each area municipality was circulated a copy of the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy for review and comment. Collaboration with all Regional stakeholders and partners is fundamental to the concept of sustainability.

7. CONCLUSION

The final version of the *York Region Sustainability Strategy: Towards a Sustainable Region* represents a milestone in our journey towards forging a legacy of integrated, innovative and collaborative decision-making. The Sustainability Strategy is a long-term framework for making smarter decisions about all municipal responsibilities that integrates economic, environmental and community considerations. The framework is founded on nine principles that include a long-term vision, triple-bottom line evaluation, leadership, continuous improvement, stewardship, prevention and adaptation, innovation and shared responsibility. The Strategy contains over 100 action items that are organized into: Corporate Culture of Sustainability, Healthy Communities, Economic Vitality, Sustainable Natural Environment, Education, Engagement and Partnerships, and Implementation and Monitoring.

There is broad based public, stakeholder and employee support for the direction, principles and action items proposed in the Preliminary Draft Sustainability Strategy. There are, however, a number of revisions to clarify and strengthen several themes and to emphasize implementation. Changes include clarifying a vision for a sustainable region, and strengthening the areas of human services, agriculture, energy and engagement. The values of stewardship, prevention, adaptation, increased collaboration and shared responsibility have been incorporated into the Guiding Principles of Implementation. As well, the final strategy proposes an implementation plan template and priority actions for immediate implementation.

The York Region Sustainability Strategy represents first step on the journey towards sustainability and will position the Region as a leader in sustainability based governance.

Staff recommend Council adoption of the final Sustainability Strategy as shown in *Attachment 1*.

For further information about this staff report, please contact John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning, at 905-830-4444 extension 1525 or john.waller@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)