



Multi-Stakeholder Focus Group Meeting Notes

Extract: Natural Heritage Discussion Paper Only

Seminar Room, York Region Administrative Centre
17250 Yonge Street, Newmarket
1:30 pm-5:00 pm

October 9, 2007

I. Opening

Dave Hardy (Facilitator, Hardy Stevenson and Associates Limited) opened the session. He thanked the participants for attending and indicated that the purpose of the focus group is to allow everyone to provide feedback on York Region's draft Sustainability Strategy, Natural Heritage Strategy, and Infrastructure Sustainability Principles.

III. York Region Natural Heritage Strategy

Natural Heritage Strategy Presentation

Karen Antonio-Hadcock, Senior Planner at the Region of York, gave a presentation on the Natural Heritage Strategy (NHS).

Natural Heritage Strategy Discussion

- A participant asked how much communication the Region would be having with other jurisdictions regarding effects on Lake Ontario.
- George Zukovs, President of XCG Consultants, said that potentially the Natural Heritage Strategy could be broadened out to include water resources. He said it is significant that the water systems are not addressed in the strategy.

In York Region 25-30 years from now, what would your vision for natural heritage protection be? What do you see? What would you want to see?

- Water resources are tied to climate change. The Region is facing drought this year. The participant said, a NHS is important, but York's natural areas will not survive if we do not look at how we do business. The NHS should include

some of the urban areas and mature habitats as well. The NHS needs a more robust view than it has right now.

- The approach of the NHS is to fit the NHS within the development process. However, he said, we should look at it from reverse perspective. We should ask ourselves, “can that house fit in the watershed”?
- York Region has been pursued decision making as a three-legged stool for a very long time. In fact, development interests have not taken place over ecology for at least the last 10 years. To say that environmental interests have not been given priority in the past is inaccurate.
- A participant said that the NHS should emphasize the notion of integrity. This would involve looking at the health of the ecosystem, the ability of the system to respond to stress, and the ability of the system to evolve in a changing context. Having the system being able to adapt to evolving changes is key.
- Many species will not survive in York Region in the future. The forward of the NHS indicates that a robust and healthy natural system is required. This is very effective.
- The document points out need the need to address the whitebelt, which is not necessary. A significant woodlands study would be useful.
- There is nothing in the NHS about grasslands. From a development perspective grasslands are typically thought of as “good to go”. This issue should be carefully considered however, and grasslands that need to be protected should be identified.
- In order to ensure that the NHS will meet its goals in the next 25-30 years, it should focus more on infill and intensification.
- The Region should address governance issues because there are a lot of agencies that have comments to provide about the NHS. There has to be a governance strategy that dictates where messages are received from. There is a need to know who can make decisions about the NHS, aside from the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

Are the listed actions bold and aggressive enough? Cautious and deliberate enough? Just about right --- for implementing the Natural Heritage Strategy?

- The plan has to be brought forward systematically.

- We have an unprecedented opportunity to do the 'right thing'. If the Region is going to protect natural areas, the Region needs to ensure that there are sufficient buffers and lands adjacent to protected areas. If biodiversity is to be protected, the Region has to take the bold step of strengthening land uses.
- There needs to be more emphasis on the benefits of green infrastructure.
- Currently, the plan is not necessarily 'bold', although it has strengths. The Region has the opportunity to be bold in areas that businesses see, that utilities see, and that other stakeholders see, but that residents might not necessarily be able to see. Taking action during the development and site plan review stage would be helpful.
- Regarding the cost efficiency of initiatives, the NHS should contain financial information.
- The Region did a good job on the discussion paper. However, there are a number of agencies involved in natural heritage. What is missing from the NHS is information regarding the coordination of parties, and the identification/development of actors.
- In response to the previous comment, coordination can start in the land use planning process, because that is when all of the actors are involved.

Final Question: Are you aware of any barriers that might 'trip up' the Region in the development and implementation of the Natural Heritage Strategy?

- The Region has to implement the strategy properly prior to the development process. It will be important to get all of the relevant stakeholders involved before the plan would be tested before the OMB.
- The province's growth plan (Places to Grow) might provide a barrier though its growth targets and requirements. The growth plan puts growth in places that do not have water and sewage, which does not seem to make sense. The Region may have to develop compromises as a result.
- The Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program should be considered in York Region. This program enables restoration on farmlands by paying farmers to undertake restoration. The ALUS program has been used in the United States and Europe.

- An urban forest effects model should be examined (UFORE)¹. This model would indicate how much pollution is being taken up by trees in York Region. Additionally, carbon levels can be calculated with this model, and this could be used as a revenue stream if carbon trading was implemented.
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is important. SEA takes analysis up to a higher level than traditional EA and fosters more effective decision making. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency has given some funding to enable additional research on SEA.

¹ www.ufore.org indicates that: "UFORE refers to a computer model that calculates the structure, environmental effects and values of urban forests. The UFORE model was developed in the late 1990s by researchers at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service in Syracuse, NY".