York Regional Council Highlights

Meeting held on
February 21, 2008

The Regional Municipality of York

United Way of York Region recognizes York Region staff

York Regional Council today received a presentation from United Way of York Region CEO Daniele Zanotti, thanking The Regional Municipality of York for staff fundraising efforts in the 2007 United Way campaign.

Staff from York Region and York Regional Police raised more than $202,000 for the United Way in 2007, helping the charitable organization to achieve its fundraising goal of $9 million.

As part of this success, York Region won two prestigious awards from the United Way, including the Community Fund Spirit Award for raising the most donations for the United Way of York Region's Community Fund and the Employee Campaign Spirit Award for increasing awareness about the United Way and exceeding our fundraising target.

York Region and York Regional Police participate annually in the United Way of York Region's fundraising drive. The United Way of York Region collects and redistributes funds to more than 40 member agencies that provide valuable social services to York Region residents.

York Region to recognize March as Red Cross Month

The Regional Municipality of York will recognize March as Red Cross Month. Red Cross Month is intended to promote public awareness of the Red Cross's programs, services and disaster relief efforts across Canada.

York Region to recognize June 1st as Peace Tree Day

The Regional Municipality of York will recognize June 1, 2008 as Peace Tree Day. Peace Tree Day is an annual festival for people of every culture, race and religion to celebrate peace and diversity together.

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York Region calls for tougher sentencing for drug related crimes

York Regional Council today endorsed the York Regional Police Services Board report “Penalties for Crimes Involving Illicit Drugs,” that calls for tougher penalties for those that manufacture, traffic, import or export illegal drugs.

The report recognizes the pervasive nature of the global drug trade and its negative effects on our communities and calls for provincial and federal Justice ministers to take action now and increase penalties for drug-related crimes.

The report will be circulated to members of Parliament, members of Provincial Parliament, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

York Region Food Network praised for efforts

York Regional Council received a presentation by Sue Smitko, a volunteer for the York Region Food Network, concerning the increasing need for food banks in York Region.

Despite the social and economic progress York Region has made over the past many years, the need for food banks continues to increase. Ms. Smitko illustrated this growing need by mentioning that two new food banks opened in York Region last year, with nine banks now in operation.

York Region Chairman and CEO Bill Fisch praised the efforts of Ms. Smitko and the York Region Food Network for the services they offer to our community and added best wishes for a successful fundraising effort through the network's Annual Charity Golf Tournament, to be held on August 27th.

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York Region claims highest growth rate in Ontario and third highest in Canada

York Regional Council received preliminary information about York Region's socio-economic trends based on the Statistics Canada 2006 Census data that is currently available.

Following is a sampling from the report:

- York Region grew 22.4 per cent from 729,254 in 2001 to 892,712 in 2006 making it the highest growth rate for a Census Division in Ontario and the third highest in Canada. Peel Region, which had the second highest growth rate in Ontario, grew by 17.2 per cent and the City of Toronto grew by less than 1 per cent.

- Most of York Region's growth is due to a rapid increase in York Region immigrant population. The GTA has the highest number of immigrants in Canada but most growth was in the 905 municipalities.

- Unlike most of Canada, the traditional family structure is still dominant in York Region, with 82.7 per cent of census families being married couples compared to 73.9 per cent in Ontario. This is also the highest proportion of married couples in the GTA.

- In 2006 there were 275,680 private dwellings in York Region compared to 223,185 in 2001. Renters have decreased from 13.7 per cent in 2001 to 11.7 per cent in 2006 and are the lowest proportion in the GTA. This indicates that the rental market continues to tighten in York Region and low income households may have fewer options for housing.

- In 2001, 40 per cent of York Region's total population were immigrants. By 2006, the immigrant population represented 43 per cent of the total population. Now, 380,535 immigrants make York Region their home.

- The top five non-official languages spoken in York Region homes are: Chinese languages (40.5 per cent), Italian (8.4 per cent), Russian (7.9 per cent), Persian (6 per cent), and Tamil (5 per cent).

The data is intended to support and promote service and community program design that is more responsive to York Region's changing demographics in all nine local municipalities. The data analysis was undertaken by York Region in partnership with the York Region Consortium, a partnership of public sector organizations in York Region.

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Water and wastewater design standards will help ensure safe and efficient services

York Regional Council approved a report detailing the Water and Wastewater Design Standards and Guidelines and its maintenance program.

The design standards provide detailed instruction to engineers and contractors to successfully implement a project through various stages. The components include:

- General Guidelines
- Design Standards and Guidelines
- Technical Specifications
- Standard Drawings
- Approved Equipment and Instrument List

The development and application of the standards will help ensure safe and efficient services for the residents of York Region and aligns with the intent of Vision 2026, the Region's blueprint for the future.

The new design standards are posted on the Region's website (www.york.ca/standards) for use by all internal and external users.

Automated services for York Region Transit/Viva customers reduce live calls

York Regional Council today approved a report outlining the 2007 YRT/Viva Customer Service Centre activities.

Transit ridership in York Region has grown from 7.5 million trips a year seven years ago to over 18 million trips in 2007. To manage growth, call centre improvements were introduced, including new telephone technology, new computer software for customer service representatives, expanded call options for customers and additional staff resources.

A new technology, RideQuest Call, was launched in June 2007. This new feature allows customers to receive automated schedule information by phone seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

After the introduction of RideQuest Call, live calls to YRT/Viva Customer Service Representatives were reduced by 17 per cent daily.

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Back-up disposal plan for source separated organics approved

York Regional Council today approved a contingency plan to export surplus source separated organics (SSOs) to a facility based in Niagara Falls, New York.

The short-term plan with Covanta Niagara L.P. ensures that York Region would have continuous Green Bin program operations in the event of service disruptions at existing facilities in Ontario and Quebec, where the Region has processing contracts.

Reduction in processing capacity at the existing facilities in 2007 has prompted the need for a contingency plan.

The Covanta location is an energy-from-waste facility. The short-term solution would be used only until additional Ontario and Quebec capacity becomes available in late 2008.

Further safety measures for Davis Drive West may include more traffic lights

York Regional Council has asked staff from the Roads Transportation branch to meet with stakeholders from the Township of King and the Town of Newmarket to discuss options for the placement of at least two traffic signals along Davis Drive West (formerly Highway 9).

In December 2007, York Regional Council approved a number of safety features along Davis Drive West, including:

- Regular use of York Regional Police patrols on the roadway, including monitoring by aircraft
- The use of speed indicator signs to inform drivers of their speeds
- Increased signage, indicating penalties for speeding
- Re-naming Highway 9 to Davis Drive West to reflect this is not a provincial roadway

Implementation of these features took place immediately, with a commitment to follow-up with further measures. Traffic signals have been proposed to help break the flow of traffic and allow better access to Davis Drive West from connecting roadways.

Stakeholders include affected business owners and councillors and staff of the Township of King and the Town of Newmarket. York Regional Council will receive recommendations later this spring after the stakeholder consultation is complete.

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Preliminary Transportation Tomorrow Survey results show jump in public transit use by York Region residents

York Regional Council received a report outlining preliminary results of the 2006 Transportation Tomorrow Survey. Results show that transit use for work trips is the highest ever recorded for The Regional Municipality of York.

York Region had the highest percentage increase in the number of weekday transit trips in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), increasing by 61,000 trips per day, or a 91 per cent increase between 2001 and 2006. This increase is consistent with the annual ridership increase on York Region Transit (YRT) from 7.7 million in 2001 to 17.1 million in 2006.

These numbers indicates that York Region's investments in YRT and Viva are successful in increasing usage of public transit and moving the Region towards a vision of a more self-contained, less car-dependent and more sustainable city-region of the future.

With 9.4 per cent of York Region residents now using transit during the morning peak period, it marks the first increase in 20 years. However, automobile use at 79 per cent remains the dominant transportation mode in York Region.

The data confirms York Region residents are finding alternative modes of travel more than ever. This shift in York Region travel patterns include:

- The proportion of York Region residents working in Toronto continues to decline from 50 per cent in 1986 to 42 per cent in 2006.
- More York Region residents stay in the Region to work. As of 2006, 53 per cent of residents work within the Region, an increase from 49 per cent in 1996.
- The average trip length to work – approximately 20 kilometres – has remained constant from 1986 to 2006.
- The average trip length for York Region residents for all trip purposes has continued to decline from 16.5 kilometres in 1986 to 15 kilometres in 2006.
- York Region residents are increasingly choosing sustainable modes of travel to work. The share of carpooling is eight per cent, transit is 11 per cent and walking is two per cent. Altogether, those who choose alternative modes of travel to work are nearing their highest level in almost 20 years.

The final survey results will be released this spring.

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New marketing initiative identifies sustainable tact

York Regional Council today approved a new economic development marketing initiative that will promote the natural and cultural attributes of The Regional Municipality of York. The approach is part of a strategy to increase the Region's visibility as a unique and desirable location for business investment and tourism.

The competition for new business investment in today's global marketplace is about attracting educated innovators and skilled labour to our communities. Companies will relocate and expand in a community that offers a welcoming business climate in a competitive and prosperous economy with a high quality labour force and a diverse range of opportunities for social and educational upgrading.

York Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communications Initiative will:

1. Attract new investment opportunities from companies that are leaders in their industries and have demonstrated a commitment to the principles of environmental sustainability

2. Strengthen York Region's cluster of more than 170 companies already involved in environmental businesses, which is one of the fastest-growing markets

3. Encourage existing York Region businesses to enhance their competitiveness through environmentally-sound business practices

Attracting visitors and increasing economic benefits from tourism

York Regional Council today received an overview of the Region's tourism program for 2007.

The program promotes York Region to travellers in two key markets: Consumers Leisure (Visitors and York Region Residents) and Meetings and Groups. It also focused on maintaining industry relations and developing tourism destinations within the Region.

The 2007 marketing activities helped to increase interaction within the tourism industry and particularly between businesses that can partner and collaborate to reach more potential visitors.

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Training module for tourism staff is key to improving overall image of York Region

Regional Council today received an update on the development of a customer service training program for tourism businesses that is based on the Character Community principals and philosophy.

The York Region Tourism Customer Service Program provides guidelines and training to help front-line staff learn how to greet visitors in a friendly manner, deal with them politely and effectively and encourages staff to make visitors feel welcome. This program helps visitors to feel at home, which increases their sense of loyalty either as a repeat visitor or as an ambassador who communicates their experience to family, friends and colleagues.

It is hoped this training will help to improve the overall appeal and image of York Region as a viable tourist destination.

Responding to the skills training needs of industry to enhance competitiveness

York Regional Council approved a plan to create a stakeholder advisory committee to develop a business case, mission, goals and an implementation plan for a York Region Industry Education Council.

This initiative will meet a strategic direction, “Sustaining a High Quality Workforce,” which was one of five strategic directions identified in the 2005 Economic Strategy. It will align workforce development efforts with the needs of existing and new business clusters, to make the Region more competitive for investment.

An education council will develop initiatives to encourage institutions of advanced learning, research and training to form stronger partnerships with industry. It will also create a learning climate and training culture within York Region that meets the evolving needs of growth industries in advanced sectors, including biotechnology, biopharma, communications technology and auto parts manufacturing.

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The Regional Municipality of York carries out emergency readiness preparations

York Regional Council today received an update on the actions undertaken by The Regional Municipality of York to comply with the annual requirements of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* and Ontario Regulation 380/04 to deal with potential, large-scale emergencies and disasters.

The *Act* and Regulation require Ontario municipalities and provincial ministries to develop, implement and maintain a comprehensive emergency management program that incorporates a full range of measures to reduce risks, including prevention/mitigation; preparedness, response and recovery.

Actions taken by York Region throughout 2007 include:

- Updating York Region's Emergency Plan to the Incident Management System (IMS) that defines the basic command structure, roles and responsibilities required for the effective management of an emergency or disaster.

- Completion of first generation Business Resumption Plans that identify the people, facilities and resources needed to resume critical services and operations in an alternate location.

- Updating Hazard Analysis and Risk Assessment (HIRA) and Critical Infrastructure which provide the basis for risk mitigation strategies and emergency preparedness programs and services in York Region.

- Conducted Regional Emergency Operations Center Training and "Operation Rising Waters" exercise in October 2007 based on a hypothetical flood scenario.

- Delivered public education and awareness program products, including updating and publishing the Emergency Preparedness Guide and updating the Emergency Management website.

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York Regional Council approves *YorkLink* community services directory for March release

York Regional Council today approved the release of the *2008 YorkLink Directory*, an annual community services directory that provides residents and community agencies with updated, comprehensive information about local community services.

More than 700 directory listings describe the services each agency provides, plus contact information. Where applicable, listings also cite the availability of accessibility features, such as elevators, barrier-free washrooms and parking spaces for people with disabilities.

At the end of March, print copies will be distributed to local community agencies, libraries, schools, government offices and information kiosks that use *YorkLink* to connect their clients to other community services.

Translation services are available to meet the needs of York Region's culturally diverse population. *YorkLink* includes translation assistance in Arabic, Cantonese/Mandarin, Farsi, French, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Urdu and Vietnamese.

YorkLink is available online through the York Region website at www.york.ca where you can also access a .pdf format for people with visual disabilities. After the end of March, you may obtain a printed copy free of charge by calling 905 830-4444 or 1-877-464-9675, Ext. 2151, or by emailing yorklink@york.ca

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The next Regional Council meeting will be held Thursday, March 27, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.

The contents of this summary are for information purposes only. Actual text of Council resolutions and official copies of reports to Council can be obtained from the York Region website at www.york.ca under Regional Government.