



Appendix D

Sustainability Focus Group Outcome



York Region

Natural Heritage Focus Group

Meeting Notes

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.

II. York Region Draft Sustainability Strategy

Sustainability Strategy Presentation

John Waller, Director of Long Range Planning at the Region of York, provided an overview of the Sustainability Strategy.

Sustainability Strategy Discussion

Does the sustainability strategy correspond with your personal values?

- York Region should be complimented on the work completed so far. In the healthy communities section of the Sustainability Strategy, issues such as crime prevention and heritage may be off topic for a 'sustainability' document.

- Sustainability is about integration; therefore, the healthy communities piece of the Sustainability Strategy is valuable. The UNESCO sustainability framework, which is widely regarded as a good model of integration, emphasizes this.

There isn't much discussion about how trade-offs can be made between different criteria. The Region should not maximize its achievement on some criteria at the expense of other criteria. The sustainability framework should contain rules for making trade-offs.

- The 'forward' of the Natural Heritage Strategy was well done and should be added to the Sustainability Strategy.
- A lot of the action areas in the Sustainability Strategy are in silos. However, where is the vision in the document? The document needs to articulate a strong vision.

Based on your opinion, do you believe that York Region's draft Sustainability Strategy now contains the right sustainability components?

- There needs to be a section on how people are supposed to engage with the document. The document contains some mixed messaging about this, and that it would be helpful if the document can provide a framework for engagement.
- The average person does not really understand what sustainability is. If the strategy will be touching on numerous areas, the messaging about sustainability should remain consistent and clear. Sometimes the term 'sustainable' can be interpreted in a negative light, because it can refer to maintaining the status quo and not improving the existing situation.
- The Region of York exists in the context of a larger Region, and there are numerous linkages outside of York that are relevant. Positioning sustainability in the context of the broader Region would be helpful.

How far should York Region go in terms of pushing the 'sustainability envelope'?

- The Region should acknowledge its relationship with other regions and other governments. It should also acknowledge factors beyond the control of the Region.
- The healthy communities section of the strategy is good. If the Region wants to be a leader, the Region should push the envelope on issues outside of its

current mandate (e.g. pesticide use), and work with other jurisdictions to develop initiatives in these areas.

- York Region has taken a leadership role, and should be recognized for that. Many local businesses, however, do not know how to engage in initiatives. A lot of corporate stakeholders want to get involved in sustainability, but they're not sure how. More outreach would help address this issue.
- People often identify with their community and neighbourhood when they think about sustainability-related issues; therefore, engaging people where they are is important.
- Sustainability is a local to global issue. Examples of issues that you can engage businesses on are food security and energy security. The Region should encourage people to think about sustainability as a local to global problem.
- The issue of equity is not well articulated in the document. Inter-generational equity and intragenerational equity could be emphasized to a greater extent.

York Region is trying to develop a 'world leading' sustainability strategy. Is this it?

- The strategy is not 'world leading' yet. Continuing to push the envelope to build upon the progress that has already been made is important.
- The business community would like to engage in sustainability, but they don't have time. But, if you look at Water For Tomorrow as an example, why can't York Region roll out greater services to the business community? The Region can push the envelope in this area.
- The Region is not yet at the point of having a world-leading sustainability strategy. The plan is not specific enough in a number of areas. It uses terminology such as "promoting" and "continuing" certain initiatives, but it does not necessarily say how various actions will be undertaken.
- The strategy should address climate change and adaptation. For example, an urban parking strategy could help implement these policies.
- The strategy is silent on agriculture, and it is silent on "big bold moves" that the Region could effectively undertake. VIVA was one such bold move, and there are others.
- The Brundtland Commission provides an old view of sustainability. Sustainability is really about sustaining life functions; as such, York Region

should be looking to move to a restorative economy. How do we restore an ecology and economy that we've taken from for so long?

- The Natural Step¹ is a good framework. In this framework, everything is connected to everything else. The interactions between different parts of the system should be addressed to create a larger vision. To push the envelope, York Region should look at social interactions with the environment and economy.

Are you aware of any barriers that might 'trip up' the Region in the development and implementation of the Sustainability Strategy?

- The Region will have to be clear about who or what department will try to deliver services.
- The 'elephant in the room' is people's willingness to change their behaviour. People have to understand that their personal behaviour must change for sustainability to move forward.
- How we measure 'success' through York Region's sustainability initiatives is crucial. What is required, ultimately, is a major cultural shift toward sustainability; therefore, it would be inaccurate if we called minor actions successes.
- The sustainability strategy needs a 'storyline', which communicates why certain actions were undertaken and what these actions actually achieved. For example, in the Water for Tomorrow Program, the purposes of the program and its achievements were well communicated. After York Region has implemented the Sustainability Strategy, there should be follow-up to communicate successes.
- The Region should operate with humility in its development of sustainability initiatives. At the end of the day, the Region may be only one of the many players involved in developing actions. Inviting people to be part of a vision should be emphasized.
- The Strategy outlines an intention to create a website and take numerous other actions. However, it is not necessary for the Region to state that it will

¹ www.naturalstep.org indicates that The Natural Step Framework which requires that in a sustainable society, nature will not be subject to systematically increasing:

- a. Concentrations of substances extracted from the earth's crust;
- b. Concentrations of substances produced by society;
- c. Degradation by physical means.

A fourth requirement is that human needs are met worldwide.

take all of these actions independently. There are a lot of relevant resources available from other organizations, which York Region should use.

- Sustainability requires not just one government, but multiple governments (the municipalities, the province, etc.) working together. Fostering partnerships is crucial.
- York Region needs to develop a social marketing campaign, given that other participants have mentioned the need to foster partnerships.

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)². 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.

² 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”.

IV. Infrastructure Master Plans Sustainability Principles

Infrastructure Master Plans Sustainability Principles Presentation

Paul May presented the Infrastructure Master Plans sustainability principles.

Infrastructure Master Plans Sustainability Principles Discussion

Referring to the Common Principles, a participant asked what is meant by 'value for money' in principle #2.

Paul May said that the principle refers to being as efficient as possible in infrastructure spending. The infrastructure that will be developed will maximize benefit for dollar.

To what extent do you feel the Region has identified every opportunity for integrating the two Master Plans? Has the Region missed any obvious opportunities for integration?

- What are the real trends behind the principles? People in the community are becoming more self-sufficient and entrepreneurial over time. Thus there is a trend toward less commuting to corporate offices and more home based businesses. The Region should look at this trend in deciding if new highways are actually needed. The Region should double-check to see if commuters are actually the main demographic that needs to be served.

Commuters are not the most important demographic anymore. There are youth that are rebelling against the prototypical 9-to-5 life, and baby boomers are retiring. Youth are all on the internet, and they don't buy into the corporate culture. As a result, the Region needs to anticipate a shift in commuting patterns. Transportation planners should take those trends into account.

- Paul May indicated that the Region monitors transportation trends carefully. The Region has participated in a survey of transportation trends annually since 1986. In terms of the peak period, the percentage of people traveling to work is declining, but there is a much greater percentage doing other things (e.g. dropping off kids, doing personal business, etc.). As a result, the number of trips per person is increasing. He said although videoconferencing and telecommuting will hopefully increase over time, the Region cannot rely on that.
- The Region should be praised for developing the Smart Commute Program. The Chamber of Commerce would not be offering the program without the

Region of York's leadership. Also, over 75% of the businesses in Ontario are small businesses, and are the economic driver in Ontario.

- John Waller noted that in York Region, over 80% of businesses have less than 10 employees.
- In the Water and Wastewater strategy, there should be more information about where the Region gets its water. People need to understand the Region's context better.
- For the Transportation Master Plan, the Region should bring the perspectives of low-income people into the discussion. In 2001, 10% of York Region's population were living below the low income cut off level (LICO). The Region cannot ignore the people who are struggling the most.
- One of the positive themes that came up strongly through the transportation principles was that the Region will do everything it can to address transportation demand before actually widening roads. Should this theme be included in the water and wastewater principles as well?
- One of the cross-cutting principles in both of the Master Plans is consultation, collaboration, and transparency. This issue has been very well addressed thus far. The Region should now also ask people how they want to be engaged, and develop consultation methods based on this information.
- In reference to principle #2 on the integrated principles list, within the water industry 'full and equitable funding' means that a water utility can charge for its full operations costs.
- Can you not have full cost recovery in transportation?
- There are many opportunities to take action in developing full and equitable funding for transportation. The location of businesses and other issues should be addressed.
- Communication and coordination is a very important issue. Currently, there is a transportation demand management study in Georgina. This study has revealed that a bus goes down Leslie Street, but does not link to the GO Train station in the area. In this example, coordination between relevant agencies failed.
- The length of time that people stay in new jobs and/or new homes is plummeting. Therefore, York Region needs to build flexibility into all of its models, because the population is incredibly mobile.

- Transit may not be a complete necessity, whereas water is. There is an organization, for example, which offers a free service of buses at lunchtime, which is underused. On the other hand, water is essential.
- In the principles there is no discussion of roads achieving full cost recovery through tolls and other means. The Region discusses transit all the time, but there is no discussion about the full costs of developing road infrastructure, such as the costs of pollution. The Region should do an analysis of the “true costs” of having roads.

Do you think that the Region is moving toward your vision of sustainability?

- Some of the joint principles can be focussed in a hierarchy. There is an opportunity to refocus the principles around some key issues.

Has the region included all of the necessary principles?

i. Water and Wastewater Sustainability Principles

- Some context should be included in the material about where York Region’s water comes from. Water does not simply come out of the tap, and it should not be taken for granted.
- York Region should be complimented for addressing stormwater in the principles. However, the principles do not indicate what the role of the Region will be in addressing stormwater. The Region’s role should involve funding.
- Water and wastewater principle #4, which addresses the wise use of water, is somewhat weak. If York Region wanted to be ambitious the principle should say that “no new water” will be used.
- Water permitting in the Region should be examined. York Region needs to push the province to model how much water is actually in the Region. Most of the water in the Region’s aquifers is glacial water.
- In both documents there is similar wording about having respect for natural heritage, water, and other issues. However, there should be a hierarchy in which avoidance is done first, and mitigation done second.

ii. Transportation Sustainability Principles

Dave Hardy asked if there are any principles missing from the Transportation Master Plan principles.

- The transportation principle “to support our economic well being” (#3) should also include environment and health. The car is the biggest polluter in the Region. Doctors generally understand this, and there’s a push from the medical profession to address these issues.
- Something should be added about marketing and education to the principles.
- Communication is reflected in the principles for both plans, and that this was a good issue to include.
- More information is needed about the relationship between land use and transportation. The value of integrating land use and transportation planning is doubtful.
- Monitoring, adaptive management, and performance measurement are key. There is so much uncertainty and complexity about sustainability planning. The need for monitoring and flexibility is important.
- The notion of tradeoffs is important. There should be information about how the Region will make tradeoffs between different principles.
- York Region should be commended for the consultation that has been done thus far. There could be complacency, however, after the document is done. Consultation should be continued, and young people specifically should be engaged.
- In some cases, you have to put an investment up-front. For example, VIVA built a station, with no sidewalks to get there. A safe walking environment is important. We have to build supporting infrastructure up-front.
- Regarding transportation principle #3 the wording should be stronger than just ‘support’. If you’re looking at sustainability, why isn’t there a priority on hiring locally?
- There is a finite supply of fossil fuel. Therefore, if the Region is planning out for 20 years, it should take into consideration that the Region won’t have cheap fossil fuels anymore. As such, the ‘peak oil’ problem should be taken into consideration. The construction business has to use fossil fuels to build transportation infrastructure. The Region needs to get transit infrastructure in place before fuels are used up.

VI. Final Comments

Dave Hardy asked if the participants wanted to make any final comments about the day's discussion.

- The transportation sustainability principles offer a significant opportunity for net gain.
- How do we operationalize the principles at the local level?
- The Region needs to be as bold as possible. York Region should take a step in a direction that no other jurisdictions have gone before.
- As a reiteration of the previous comment, boldness and innovation are important.
- We have to think globally and regionally, particularly regarding water supply. It is uncertain if York Region's neighbours to the south will be keen about the Region taking more water from Lake Ontario.
- Thanks for the opportunity to provide comments.
- This is a good initiative. There needs to be more careful thought, however, about projections. If the numbers used are not close to reality, it will be problematic. Developing projections through backcasting may have merit.
- This is a good initiative. I would like to assist with implementation.
- Developing a checklist for implementation would be useful for the Region.
- George Zukovs (President, XCG Consulting) said that this has been an interesting activity. As far as water is concerned, we need to focus on partnerships to manage water. Also, he said, you have to look at the hydrologic cycle as a whole. He would propose and promote "total water management".

Also, we have to build in the idea of adaptation in what we do.

- Can the natural environment of York Region realistically support the growth that is projected to occur in the Region? It does not seem like this question is being asked.

The approach needs to be "we must take it", or "we need a moratorium". There is an opportunity to make new developments energy efficient, water-

conserving, etc. Also, regarding natural heritage, the Region should define its east-west corridor, and set up protection for it.

- York Region is showing good leadership in developing these initiatives. The Region should be clear, however, about the private sector's role in these engagements. The Region should tell the private sector exactly what they should do to achieve sustainability, and how the program(s) can be sustained over time.
- There should be more focus on what healthy and inclusive communities are. There is a considerable tie-in between the sustainability initiatives and affordable housing.
- There are a couple of resources to look at for information about localization: Business Alliance for Local Living Economy (BALLE, www.livingeconomies.org), and Relocalization Network (www.relocalize.net). These resources would help provide localization ideas and models for the Region's consideration.

VII. Closing

John Waller stated that as we proceed in discussions about sustainability in York Region, the level of the debate rises. The more the Region can have these kinds of discussions, the better.

He indicated that comments, reports, etc. will be shared.

END OF SESSION

Notes: S. Coelho, RPP.