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## **Waterloo Region: Creating a Sustainable and Resilient Community**

In May of 2010, reporting on The Sustainable Cities Challenge<sup>1</sup> in Toronto, Rob Kerr, vice-president of Globe Scan said, **“Troublingly ... there was little understanding among civic leaders of the environmental impact of infrastructure... there’s low recognition of how to make better decisions on infrastructure so the environment gets protected rather than just paved over.”**

Another speaker, Tom Rand, said, **“The state is involved in creating the opportunity for innovation to flourish.”**

The sustainability issues discussed at this conference are common to all cities, Waterloo Region being no exception.

Grand River Environmental Network members have created this document for all candidates for the 2010 municipal election to guide their policy-making decisions and ensure that every effort is made to protect our water, air and land for current and future generations. It is our hope that this document will be used to facilitate better communication, high standards, transparency and cooperation among all levels of government in Waterloo Region.

### **Sustainable and Resilient 2010 and Beyond**

Sustainable and resilient communities value innovation, and are pedestrian-friendly, safe, able to adapt to change and as self-sufficient as possible. We are fortunate in Waterloo Region to have an ample supply of pristine groundwater, extensive agricultural land—especially family farms—and a thriving economy. But we are, as most cities, saddled with outmoded planning and infrastructure models that favour private cars over people.

Fortunately, there are ways to rehabilitate our Region, meet the needs of a growing population and ensure that all projects improve our environment.

Exemplary municipal models, like Okotoks Alberta, prioritize the impact of all planning decision on the environment and water. Measures such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are no longer valid; rather, they are being replaced by Genuine Progress Indicators that measure what is really important to people – “health care, safety, a clean environment and other indicators of well-being.”<sup>2</sup>

Although Waterloo area governments have demonstrated excellent planning decisions regarding designation of Environmentally Sensitive Landscapes (ESL’s), the proposed combined Light Rail Transit/Bus Rapid Transit and the Growth Management Strategy, they have fallen short by not extending the proposed LRT/BRT to Cambridge, approving huge subdivision on Waterloo’s west side in high water recharge areas without adequate protection and lower tier governments not abiding by the Regional Official Plan in their planning decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.events-canadianbusiness.com/sustainability/](http://www.events-canadianbusiness.com/sustainability/)

The Sustainable City Challenge report, sponsored by Siemens Canada in conjunction with the David Suzuki Foundation and conducted by GlobeScan, interviewed 243 experts in 12 major Canadian cities on issues of transportation, energy, water and wastewater, healthcare, and safety and security.

<sup>2</sup> [www.rprogress.org/sustainability\\_indicators/genuine\\_progress\\_indicator.htm](http://www.rprogress.org/sustainability_indicators/genuine_progress_indicator.htm)

## **Infrastructure and Planning**

- Citizens included at beginning before decisions are made
- Consultations begin right at the beginning of any planning process
- Consistent communication and cooperation between Environmental Advisory Committees
- All planning decisions to be approved by Regional Council – e.g. proposals for subdivisions
- Reactivate Regional Environment Committee and refer all issues with environmental implications
- Limit public/private partnerships (P3's).
  - Long term debt taken on by a community for profit-sharing by outside corporations disadvantages local autonomy and costs for future generations e.g. P3 hospitals have drained millions from communities resulting in down-graded original plans and increased debts.
  - Governments can borrow at lower rates than corporations and corporations have a priority for proprietary secrecy.
  - Taxes should pay for public utilities.
- Develop specific checklist for standardized ecological testing to promote objectivity and help eliminate Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearings
- Enforce existing regulations over pre-existing grandfathered regulations
- Need a vision for how we're going to grow. Ensure infill is done smartly, respecting the integrity, diversity and heritage of specific communities and neighbourhoods
- Challenge excessive provincial population density numbers e.g. Guelph
- Councillors to provide clear direction to staff on the built and natural environment
- Procure objective "experts" rather than relying on those from developers
- Expect three solutions from planning staff to allow council to meet their elected objectives and avoid rubberstamping easy (usually old) solutions.
- Support heritage of the community – green infrastructure, trees, parks, streets as well as buildings – with a dedicated budget
- Create lobby registry of developers with most weight and access to planning departments.

## **Water**

Well-planned conservation initiatives and robust enforcement of water protection policies will ensure that Waterloo Region thrives on local water without having to build a billion-dollar water pipeline from Lake Erie.

- subsidize low-flow appliances e.g. toilets
- promote rainwater harvesting and water recycling
- upgrade sewage treatment plants to prevent further sewage spills
- no water taking for profit, ie. bottled water
- no development on high water recharge areas
- test eco-friendly, road salt substitutes such as Stop Gliss Bio <sup>3</sup>
- study/promote salt-free or salt-reduced water softeners e.g. California <sup>4</sup>
- stop artificial water fluoridation
- support headwater protection, the source of seventy percent of water in a watershed

### Benefits:

- saving more than a billion dollars by not building pipeline
- local control over water quality; less complicated bureaucracy in water management
- higher quality water; Lake Erie is shallow, warmest of Great Lakes with algae overgrowth and cumulative industrial and agricultural runoff from both U.S. and Canada

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<sup>3</sup> [www.workingforest.com/content/wood-chips-replace-grit-and-salt-icy-swiss-roads](http://www.workingforest.com/content/wood-chips-replace-grit-and-salt-icy-swiss-roads)

<sup>4</sup> [http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab\\_2251-2300/ab\\_2270\\_cfa\\_20080613\\_153748\\_sen\\_comm.html](http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab_2251-2300/ab_2270_cfa_20080613_153748_sen_comm.html)

## **Protected Countryside Line and Both Rural and Urban Farmland**

- Establish, in perpetuity, a firm countryside line to stop urban sprawl, protect family farms and prevent development of prime farmland (aka greenfield development)
- Support and expand community gardens and urban agriculture

### **Benefits**

- reduce our carbon footprint by reducing distance from farmer to consumer
- support the livelihood of our rural neighbours
- make local and fresh food available to our less fortunate neighbours
- reduce crime while building community and individual self-esteem
- improve our community's ability to provide for itself, regardless of disastrous global events

## **Transportation**

Transportation, after power generation, is the greatest source of air pollution. The health risks and costs are well-documented by medical authorities in the province.<sup>5</sup>

Although it is difficult to match the flexibility and freedom of individual car use, without a fully-integrated public and active transportation trail system, it will be impossible.

### **Public**

- seamless connection of proposed LRT/BRT with a comprehensive bus and trail system
- connect with inter-city transit e.g. GO, VIA
- affordable
- user-friendly
- energy-efficient
- include Cambridge
- be supported by stacked parking replacing single-level parking lots
- go to industrial areas and coordinate with start/quitting times

### **Active**

- gapless, well-signed, off-road commuter and recreational trails
- pedestrian and bike friendly public bike-rentals
- winter clearing of off-road bike transit trails
- multi-use trails that provide safe transit for bikes and pedestrians
- trails kept to periphery of woods

### **Benefits:**

- improved air quality
- improved health and fitness of residents
- urban intensification

## **Air Quality**

Although the Region's abysmal air quality is due, in part, to the migration of U.S. pollution, there is much we can do.

- set and meet public transportation targets
- set and meet tree cover target at 30%
- replacement trees should include all sizes of trees
- all municipal properties and buildings to be green-powered
- plant trees in parking lots

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<sup>5</sup> [www.oma.org/HealthPromotion/Smog/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.oma.org/HealthPromotion/Smog/Pages/default.aspx)

- purchase more green space (e.g. Hidden Valley) to preserve it and control its future use
- introduce Right to Know Bylaw (Toronto Environmental Reporting and Disclosure <sup>6</sup>) to make public the locations and amounts of toxic industrial chemicals
- upgrade all Regional vehicles to most efficient ISO 14000
- create walkable neighbourhoods that support schools and eliminate school bussing, or blend school transport with public transportation system
- to prevent bike theft, consider fenced-in bike racks in view of school offices
- introduce and enforce idling bylaws near schools
- track and target dates for green infrastructure additions and losses e.g. tree canopy
- familiarize residents with the term “heat island” to increase understanding of necessity of green streetscapes
- enforced idling bylaws e.g. Toronto has a 3 minute limit <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184\\_423.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184_423.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [www.toronto.ca/transportation/onstreet/idling.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/transportation/onstreet/idling.htm)