



619 Forest Hill Drive  
Kitchener, Ontario  
N2N 1A1

[www.gren.ca](http://www.gren.ca)

info@gren.ca 519-744-7501

## **Waterloo Region: Election 2010**

### **Creating a Sustainable and Resilient Community**

#### **Who we are**

The Grand River Environmental Network, or GREN, was formed in 2002 by Grand River Watershed residents who share a concern for our environment. Monthly meetings are held in Elmira, Waterloo, Guelph, Kitchener and Cambridge. GREN members make presentations to municipal councils, attend community information meetings on a variety of issues, and have developed position statements on both longstanding environmental problems and new proposals.

***GREN's vision is an environmentally sustainable Waterloo Region with resilient communities that value innovation, are able to adapt to change, are as self-sufficient as possible, and work within the environmental carrying capacity of the watershed.***

#### **The 2010 municipal election and the environment**

GREN recognizes the critical importance of informed debate and the election of capable individuals who will have the capacity to make effective decisions on environmental issues in our municipal councils. We are giving this document to all candidates in the upcoming municipal election to inform and guide their policy-making decisions and ensure that every effort is made to protect our water, air and land for the present and future generations. Our hope is that the ideas here will facilitate better communication, high standards, decision-making transparency and accountability, and cooperation at both the municipal and Regional levels of government.

#### **Environmental concerns in Waterloo Region**

We are fortunate in Waterloo Region to have a thriving economy, good agricultural land, and sufficient, relatively good quality groundwater to meet our needs...if used wisely.

Waterloo area governments have demonstrated the capacity to make some excellent planning decisions, such as implementing the new award-winning concept of Environmentally Sensitive Landscapes (ESLs), the proposal for a combined light rail transit/bus rapid transit system, and a regional growth management strategy.

However, there are some major problems:

- poor air quality, particularly during the increasingly frequent summer heat waves that appear to signal the advent of climate warming;
- vital groundwater resources being threatened by subdivision expansion over critical recharge areas of the Waterloo moraine on the west side of the City of Waterloo;
- increased salinity due to road salting;
- the second highest density of gravel pit developments in all of Ontario in the townships of North Dumfries and Wellesley;

- additional stress on both water and farmland due to having one of the highest urban growth rates in Canada; and
- growing automobile congestion and insufficient innovative planning to enhance public transit and open up opportunities for pedestrians and cyclists.

GREN would like to draw your attention to the following proposals to address these problems. We emphasize that there are complicated interrelationships among these issues and that comprehensive, visionary, and sustainable approaches are necessary.

### **Action on the environment**

#### **Water**

Foresight is needed to safeguard water supplies. Improved practices and increased emphasis on water conservation would allow for growth while living within local supply limitations.

- No development on vital high water recharge areas, such as the Waterloo moraine
- Support headwater protection, the source of 70% of water in a watershed
- Improve efficiencies in road salt application to reduce the amount used, investigate eco-friendly salt substitutes<sup>i</sup>, and promote salt-free or salt-reduced water softeners<sup>ii</sup>
- Expand and enhance existing residential and industrial water-conservation programs
- Promote residential rainwater harvesting and innovative conservation practices
- Examine the cumulative effects of increasingly widespread gravel extraction on the protection of groundwater (as well as the loss of productive agricultural land and natural areas) and take necessary remedial action
- Stop fluoridation of domestic water supplies.

***The alternative? Implementing such a program to provide adequate supplies of locally-derived clean water in a coordinated fashion would allow us to forego having to construct a water supply pipeline to Lake Erie that would cost hundreds of millions of dollars and dwarf the costs of all other past and proposed municipal projects.***

#### **Protecting the countryside and agriculture**

Climate change and unsafe food production and handling can wreak havoc on a safe and affordable food supply. In turn, supporting a multi-faceted, local, food production system provides other benefits for our community.

- Stop urban sprawl
- Establish, in perpetuity, a defined countryside line to protect agricultural land and natural areas from urban encroachment. Protection of prime agricultural land must be a priority.
- Support and expand regional agricultural production and enhance opportunities to conveniently purchase locally produced food.
- Help community gardens and other forms of urban agriculture flourish. These have demonstrated health, recreational, social, and economic benefits. They also improve the quality of neighbourhoods and community self-sufficiency.
- Protect and even purchase more high quality green space, such as Hidden Valley, to preserve it and control its future use.

## Transportation

Power generation is the biggest source of air pollution in Ontario. The biggest local source is transportation, particularly automobiles and trucks. Use of public transit, cycling, and walking are very low.

- Develop an effective overall transportation system with particular emphasis on increasing the use of public transportation, promoting alternatives to motorized transportation and commuting, conservation of fuel and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality, and reducing the unnecessary waste of land on roads and freeways.
- GREN supports the proposed Light Rail Transit/Bus Rapid Transit proposal, and urges that it be seamlessly integrated with the overall transportation system. Please refer to the attached document “*Grand River Environmental Network Position on Proposed Region of Waterloo LRT/BRT*” for details.
- Further develop *connected* pedestrian and cycling trails for recreation and commuting.

## Air

The Ontario Medical Association estimates that over 1,500 premature deaths are caused by air pollution each year in Ontario.<sup>iii</sup> Waterloo Region lies at the intersection of two major air sheds that bring in polluted air from Ohio to the south and Michigan to the west. Air quality in our region is thus particularly poor. Local measures can, however, help improve air quality as well as address the effects of climate warming. Municipal infrastructure should provide best-practice examples for the public.

### Set and meet meaningful public transportation targets

- Upgrade all Regional vehicles to most fuel-efficient and least polluting.
- All municipal buildings, infrastructure, and installations should be built to the highest environmental standards. GREN commends the City of Cambridge for showing the way with its state-of-the-art new city hall and new public works building: it can be done!
- The private sector should be encouraged and given incentives for greening their buildings and enterprises.
- All efforts should be made to combat or lessen the effects of climate warming. For example, the urban heat island effect can be reduced by following the lead of other cities which limit the amount of land covered by parking lots, require that roofs be reflective and parking surfaces light-coloured, insist that parking lots are shaded by trees, and set targets for overall tree coverage of urban areas (usually 30%).
- Create walkable neighbourhoods that support schools and reduce the need for school bussing. School transport should be blended with public transportation as much as possible.
- Enforce idling bylaws<sup>iv</sup> and limit drive-through enterprises that encourage idling.
- Introduce “Right to Know” bylaws (such as the Toronto Environmental Reporting and Disclosure requirement<sup>v</sup>) to make public the locations and performance of industries that might pollute air, water, and land.
- Encourage and foster non-profit sector initiatives, such as REEP (the Residential Energy efficiency program) dedicated to helping residents reduce energy use - and save money at the same time.

## Planning and Decision-Making

Municipal decision-making needs to recognize the importance of openness and public accountability. Local government should actively recruit the public to add their knowledge, concerns, and experience to decision-making processes. This will optimize the quality, acceptability, and cost-effectiveness of plans and decisions that result.

- Include residents in decision-making from the beginning of the process.
- Reactivate the moribund Region of Waterloo Environmental Committee and make it an active partner in decision-making.
- Furthering the public good must be the primary objective of any public-private partnerships.
- Consultants and advisors should be selected for their independence and objectivity, as well as their proven expertise. This is especially important when dealing with issues where there are powerful developer interests.
- Heritage, aesthetics, and excellent design need to be fostered. Highest quality green infrastructure and beautification of streets and parks need to be priorities with dedicated budgets. We are concerned that area politicians and municipal staff are reluctant to avail themselves of new powers granted by the Province of Ontario to include design quality in approval processes for new buildings and developments.
- Create a lobby registry of developers.

## A Green Economy

Waterloo Region has been badly battered by this severe recession, with the collapse of many of the industries and enterprises that were such an important part of our cities. The situation where local unemployment exceeds national averages is untenable. We are concerned that the Region of Waterloo (as well as Ontario and Canada as a nation) is missing out on the kind of opportunities to develop green industries that are so well promoted in countries like Sweden and Germany. For example, local inventors of a new form of solar energy cells were recently unable to get any financing in Ontario – but officials from the government of Germany sought them out and offered them facilities to start a factory with several hundred jobs in eastern Germany.

- Establish a green business development office in our area.
- Establish an interest-free loan programme to foster small, independent, cottage industries.

For further information, please contact:

John Jackson  
Chair  
Grand River Environmental Network  
[john@gren.ca](mailto:john@gren.ca)  
519-744-7503

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<sup>i</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>ii</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)

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

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

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