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## Conservation Halton wants to collaborate with Region on Smart Growth

by Donna Danielli

It seems like Smart Growth is on everyone's minds lately, and Conservation Halton is no exception.

When Conservation Halton unveiled its Strategic Plan at a recent open house, part of the presentation included their "Greenlight Position" on Smart Growth. The "Greenlight Position," (which is available to view as a whole at [www.conservationhalton.on.ca](http://www.conservationhalton.on.ca)) expresses concern about the rapid growth the area is expected to see and what it will mean to the environment.

Conservation Halton's watershed includes 948 sq. km of land, 25 per cent of which is forested, and the Niagara Escarpment which has been recognized as world biosphere.

Within the watershed, there are three large creeks that flow into Lake Ontario, as well as 14 smaller creeks and 36 km of Lake Ontario shoreline. The "Greenlight Position" acknowledges that "environmental degradation is inevitable with growth" but goes on to say "healthy watersheds will mean lower air pollution resulting in healthy residents. Healthy watersheds will mean adequate clean water resources to sustain communities."

However, not everyone agrees with Conservation Halton's new inroads into Smart Growth.

Members of the Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee (HAAC), and the Halton Federation of Agriculture have expressed concerns about the new direction the Strategic Plan is taking.

"It would be nice to see Conservation Halton concentrate on something closer to their mandate and do it well, rather than doing something the Region is already doing," said HAAC member Jamie Fisher. "The bottom line is that there are some pretty big gaps in the monitoring of surface water. This is what their mandate is, why aren't they looking at ways to fix the gaps?"

One of the gaps mentioned by Mr. Fisher is the lack of ongoing consistent monitoring of ground and surface water, as some problems that are seasonal may not be being observed closely enough.

Gary Hutton, Director of Marketing and Community Relations for Conservation Halton is glad to hear any of HAAC concerns in hopes of addressing them all.

"One of the primary elements of the Strategic Plan is the development of a water management plan," said Mr. Hutton. "One element that came up at the open house is that of increasing environmental monitoring and that's an element we're looking at improving."

As for whether Conservation Halton is taking on a project beyond their mandate in trying to tackle Smart Growth, Mr. Hutton does not believe so. He feels Conservation Halton can work in collaboration with the Region.

"All of the Conservation Authorities in Ontario are very interested in Smart Growth and working within municipalities to strengthen Smart Growth in the natural environment," he said. "We work closely with the Region in many initiatives such as watershed studies. We try not to duplicate services. It's a partnership with the Region to protect the natural environment."

While Mr. Fisher acknowledges that at the open house "there were certainly people that were in favour of Conservation Halton doing whatever is needed for the environment, whether it's in their jurisdiction or not," there are still concerns for him and his fellow farmers.

"We recognize that Conservation Halton has done a lot of things really well," he commented "But there seems to be a consensus that we need the Region, Conservation Halton and the local municipalities to work together. There's only one taxpayer, no matter how many bodies there are to govern it."

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