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Sustainable Communities

## Workshop Report

**"Fostering Sustainable Communities"  
A Meeting of Practitioners and Supporters**

**Toronto, Ontario  
March 12, 1993.**

**Sponsored by:  
National Round Table  
on Environment and Economy**

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NRT-1993002  
14 pp

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## 1.0 Objectives

This March 12, 1993 workshop on "Fostering Sustainable Communities" was organized by the National Round Table on Environment and Economy. The workshop venue was donated by the Toronto Waterfront Regeneration Trust, as were the facilitation and reporting services of Synergistics Consulting Limited. All attendees participated at their own expense.

The purpose of the workshop was to bring together a number of people representing the "front lines" of the sustainable community/local Round Table movement with government agencies and NGOs interested in supporting and expanding this activity, to exchange information and identify needs and opportunities for expanding community activity.

More specifically, the objectives were to:

- a) Take stock of the considerable amount of local activity in Canada related to the development of Local Round Tables or other multi-stakeholder processes contributing to community sustainability;
- b) Provide a forum for information exchange on current/planned activities;
- c) Identify barriers, opportunities and priorities related to ensuring the further growth and success of these initiatives and the sustainable communities movement as a whole.

Rather than explore each subject in detail, the intent was to "short list" key issues and directions that could be explored in greater detail in subsequent meetings and workshops that could be organized by national or provincial groups.

## 2.0 Participants

Twenty eight people attended the workshop, representing community Round Tables, environmental organizations, the Healthy Communities initiative, all levels of government, and provincial and national Round Tables. For a complete annotated listing of workshop attendees, please see the Appendix.

## 3.0 Workshop Agenda

The agenda is also included in the Appendix of this report. The first 90 minutes were devoted to round-the-table participant introductions. The remaining three

hours of workshop time involved brainstorming and discussion among the whole group, focusing on the following three topics:

1. **Taking Stock:** current issues including gaps, overlaps, barriers and opportunities associated with existing activity related to fostering community sustainability;
2. **What's Needed:** approaches, activities and supports needed to address the above issues;
3. **Getting There:** necessary mechanisms, tools, networks, etc. to put the needed elements in place.

## 4.0 Summary of Workshop Discussions

### 4.1 "Taking Stock"

As is the case with meetings of this nature, it is the peer-to-peer exchange of information and enthusiasm that has the most lasting impact on participants. The agenda began by giving all participants an opportunity to give a short summary of the relevant activities of their organizations. Some gave step-by-step summaries of their local sustainability efforts, others detailed the support they are able provide to local groups, and still others outlined the elements of their larger programs that have community components. The activities and accomplishments of participants were impressive and, recognizing that they represent only a portion of the activity going on across the country, it is clear that "sustainable community" initiatives represent a significant social movement.

Participants were then asked to step back and "take stock" of this growing field by identifying any observations, patterns or issues related to the continued evolution of sustainable community activities. Participants identified a number of current issues:

- Removal of disincentives to sustainable development planning (i.e., hidden/externalized costs).
- Lack of linkages between local and other level activity (i.e., federal).
- Lack of involvement of business sector in supporting local activity.
- Issue of competition/lack of integration among networks such as Healthy Communities, Green Communities, Cdn. Environmental Network, Round Tables.
- No consensus on what "sustainability" is.
- Undefined role for advocacy around sustainability issues.
- Lack of clear goals at all levels, and a process for developing common goals.
- Lack of a clear link to the international sphere; our global leadership role.
- Lack of incorporation of social sustainability.
- Absence of clear understanding of distinct urban and rural needs.
- Fear, exhaustion, hopelessness among leaders and the concerned public.

## 4.2 "What's Needed"

Participants were then asked to explore the approaches, activities and supports they felt are needed to advance the sustainable communities field. They identified the following needs:

- Need to provide local practitioners more "hard evidence" of problems to foster individual commitment and action at local level.
- Need to foster political will at the local level for green policies.
- Need for feedback mechanisms so that individuals at the community level can see how their sustainability contributions add up.
- Need for guidelines or performance indicators to guide planning at the community level.
- Need for money, resources, in-kind donations, and services at local level.
- Need to define key elements of the sustainable communities movement and then where different organizations and people fit in.
- Need to aggregate the dis-aggregated (i.e., get different networks together).
- Need to define areas for collaboration between networks and partners.
- Need to get the good news out, by preparing / distributing success stories.
- Need greater exchange among government/other organizations that support communities.
- Need opportunities for getting personal/professional support.
- Need municipal government buy-in.
- Need greater emphasis on process mechanisms for facilitating paths to sustainable communities.
- Need greater coordination among local-level initiatives and with other networks operating at local/regional/national levels (e.g., business, prof.).
- Need greater awareness at the community level of sustainability.
- Need more original research in Canada on community sustainability.
- Need to connect people, increase responsibility
- Need on-going exchange of ideas and experience among practitioners.

## 4.3 "Getting There"

Participants were then asked to identify the principles, best mechanisms and reasonable goals that should be applied to setting in place the needs they identified. Their specific suggestions included:

- A success stories exchange or publication to get the good news out and stimulate the replication of successful approaches.
- Opportunities for practitioners to share success stories through the spoken word rather than through paper.
- Structured, in-person opportunities (like this meeting) for exchanging information, techniques and case studies among grassroots leaders (who don't have the time to be proactive in sharing experience and generally won't use electronic bulletin boards, etc.).

### 4.3 "Getting There" (continued)

- Information clearinghouse on all areas of sustainability – what's being done.
- A telecommunications network (ask Bell to donate); government-funded, free access to existing WEB network already used by ENGOs.
- Define the roles needed within bigger picture; how each part contributes to the whole; then, let everyone identify where they are functioning in the "loop", resulting in a clear understanding of each others' roles and responsibilities.
- On-going funding programs and other support for local activities.
- Networking among networks (healthy communities, green communities, Round Tables, etc.) to minimize overlap, maximize coordination and results.
- Maintain the choices for communities (i.e., whether they want to be "green", "healthy", "safe"), yet increase gov't. program coordination.
- More analysis and evaluation of community actions and experience - why something worked or didn't; then communicating this to others.
- Develop evaluation frameworks based on accumulated experiences.
- Utilization of university research capacity.
- Pinpointing legislative impediments and regulatory/by-law barriers.
- Volunteer training; community training capacity.
- Community empowerment through group action at the community level, including job creation through Round Tables
- Twinning communities with those on other continents.
- Re-connecting with non-work self; building on commonalties among individuals.
- Allowance for failure, and support mechanisms and resources for community practitioners.
- Representation of often-excluded constituencies (women, low-income).
- Compendium of local Round Tables (print and on disk).
- Network newsletter/magazine exchange mechanism.
- Recognition and endorsement of other networks' activities so that results are less piecemeal, more integrated.
- Facilitation of leadership through defining manageable objectives / tasks.
- On-going awareness of what each other is doing; setting up a process for integration of networks, approaches and results.
- Clear definitions of what most needs to be done; develop an action research plan.
- Useful, usable and credible information on relevant topics.
- Action even in the face of the unknown.

## 5.0 Conclusions

The following is the meeting facilitator's summary of the major messages and conclusions he heard from meeting participants, for government agencies, Round Tables, networking organizations and others to consider further.

1. The "sustainable communities" network, made up of a large number of individuals and organizations operating under very similar (but differently-named) frameworks and networks, represents a significant and growing social movement in Canada, with changing needs.
2. To date, there has been very limited communication, at any level, between the different sub-networks (i.e., healthy communities, green communities, safe communities, Round Tables, etc.) and participants felt that this now needed to change.
3. Participants called for greater coordination between the different government agencies, Round Tables and networking organizations involved, in order to maximize the quality of support given to local practitioners and hence the overall success of sustainable community initiatives in Canada.
4. The community practitioners present emphasized their need for regular *in person* meetings, such as this one, to exchange information, techniques and enthusiasm with their peers as well as to explore the "big picture." They did not feel that the printed word, electronic networks or videos were adequate substitutes for in-person meetings, although they felt these additional communications channels would also be useful.
5. The scoping of issues, needs and next steps done by participants at this meeting and contained in this report could very usefully be used in planning the content and designing the process of future meetings and workshops on sustainable community topics.

**Appendices:**

**I Meeting Agenda**

**II Meeting Participants**

# "Fostering Sustainable Communities"

## AGENDA

- |          |   |                                 |
|----------|---|---------------------------------|
| 10:00 am | WELCOME<br>INTRODUCTION   | Ron Doering, NRT<br>Doug Miller |
| 10:15    | PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS<br>Each participant will have up to 5 minutes<br>to introduce their relevant activities and plans.                  | All                             |
| 12:00    | "TAKING STOCK" OF CURRENT ACTIVITIES<br>- gaps, overlaps, patterns evident in existing activity.<br>- key issues, barriers and opportunities. | All                             |
| 12:30 pm | LUNCH (Provided)<br>Networking around the resource table  |                                 |
| 1:30     | BRAINSTORMING: "WHAT'S NEEDED"<br>- approaches, activities, supports needed   | All                             |
| 2:30     | BREAK   |                                 |
| 3:00     | "GETTING THERE"<br>- guiding principles, mechanisms, networks, etc.<br>- reasonable goals, timing and responsibilities.                       | All                             |
| 4:00     | WRAP-UP SESSION   | Doug Miller<br>Ron Doering      |
| 4:15     | MEETING CONCLUDES   |                                 |



**Participants' List**  
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**March 12, 1993**  
**Toronto, Ontario**

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