



Healthy Dose of Green Strategy Session



November 29, 2012, 12:00 PM–3:00 PM
Ontario Heritage Centre, The Oval Boardroom



Summary Notes

Participants

Steve Hounsell, Ontario Biodiversity Council
Carol Karner, Region of York Public Health
Rob Keen, Trees Ontario
Jane Lewington, Conservation Ontario
Karen Morrison, University of Guelph and EcoHealth
Carol Oitment, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Sport and Culture
Emily Peterson, Public Health Ontario
Mike Puddister, Credit Valley Conservation
Loretta Ryan, Ontario Professional Planners Institute
Jo-Anne Rzadki, Conservation Ontario
Megan Williams, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Suzanne Barrett, Facilitator

Background Rob Keen

Rob provided some background context for the strategy session. Trees Ontario launched the report *A Healthy Dose of Green* at the Ontario Forestry Association Conference in February 2012¹. The report documents evidence for the human health benefits of trees and forests and draws attention to the need for significant improvements in urban and rural environmental quality. In September 2012, Trees Ontario and Conservation Ontario hosted a forum for nearly 40 people from a wide range of sectors to build on the report and discuss opportunities for integrated and comprehensive actions to improve both human and ecosystem health².

Two other events in November 2012 also addressed these themes. Karen Morrison convened a working session at the University of Guelph for environmental and public health professionals to talk about the reasons why public health and watershed organizations should collaborate. The result was a two-page document titled *Healthy Communities depend on Healthy Watersheds*³. This document was posted on Conservation Ontario's website for comment. It was also made available for feedback from participants in the annual Latornell Conservation Symposium at the

¹ *A Healthy Dose of Green: A prescription for a healthy population*
http://www.treesontario.ca/files/Healthy_Dose_of_Green_Publication.pdf

² *A Healthy Dose of Green Forum: Summary Report*
http://www.treesontario.ca/files/documents/Health_Forum_Report.pdf

³ *Healthy Communities depend on Healthy Watersheds*
http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca/NESH/healthy_ecosystems.html

Nottawasaga Inn. This year's focus was "A Prescription for a Healthy Environment" and featured a wide range of keynote speakers and concurrent sessions on this theme.

Rob noted that today's session includes key individuals who have been involved in one or more of these recent events. Our primary objective is to identify priority activities, tactics and partners for collaboration. We will then report back, not only to the participants in the September forum, but to the participants in the November meeting at University of Guelph and others who have expressed an interest in getting involved.

Overview of September 11 Forum [2] Suzanne Barrett

Suzanne provided a brief summary of highlights from the Forum. She drew attention to the Executive Summary and the Inventory of Complementary Activities. The Inventory is a snapshot in time of the wide range of activities that are already underway with the broad theme of connecting human health and ecosystem health. It is a great resource for identifying opportunities for collaboration and innovation.

Overview of November 6 Session on Public Health and Watersheds [2] Karen Morrison

Karen explained that if committed public health and watershed professionals can't explain to each other why they should work together, we have little hope of convincing others. The November 6 session and discussions at Latonell were intended to begin developing consistent communications that can be taken to the Ontario Public Health Conference in April 2013. Karen is planning a follow-up meeting in early 2013 to further develop compelling arguments and policy directions, building on identified common values and objectives. The Ecohealth Conference in Montreal in 2014 will provide another opportunity to promote these themes.

Potential Collaborative Activities [2] All

Suzanne introduced a list of potential collaborative activities that she had compiled as a starting point for discussion. The group made some additions and edits to the list: see Table 1. Discussion focused on the area of communications as a fundamental building block for all of the other activities. Highlights of the discussion included:

Framework and audiences

We need to work within a framework that starts with a vision of the future we want to achieve, based on the protection and enhancement of the environmental functions and biodiversity that sustain us. To get there, we need to make the personal connections between healthy people and healthy environments, and define some compelling arguments that will be persuasive to all sectors, starting with the public health sector, and moving on to others including medical, government, business, health insurance, planning, development, financial, engineering, forestry, agriculture, social and environmental NGOs, etc. We also need to find creative ways to reach the public, who can put pressure on governments, as well as take individual actions.

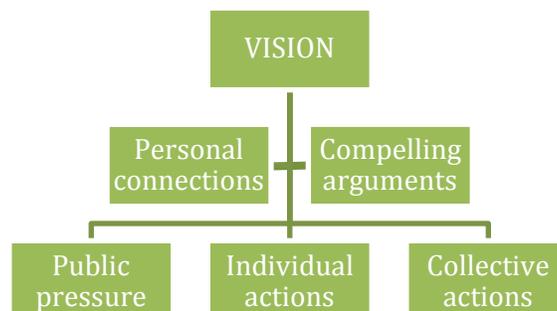


Table 1. Potential Collaborative Activities

<p>1. Communications</p>	<p>Develop common arguments/messages. Create compelling information (policy paper, call to action) that partners can include in print materials, newsletters, presentations, videos and on-line. Obtain endorsements by medical and public health associations. Identify champions. Put <i>Healthy Dose of Green</i> on-line. Showcase existing successes.</p>
<p>2. Dialogue and networking</p>	<p>Host a forum for <u>all</u> the interested and active sectors and groups to share information, network, and work on interdisciplinary themes. Create a "Biodiversity and Health" leadership/working group to guide and report on activities. Continue to build <i>Inventory of Complementary Activities</i>.</p>
<p>3. Education and training</p>	<p>Seek opportunities to speak to professionals e.g. public health, medical, engineering, planners, developers, municipal councils, insurance, school boards, businesses, institutions. Skills development for the public e.g. tree planting and maintenance, environmental restoration.</p>
<p>4. Public awareness</p>	<p>Might include print, social media, video, TV and radio Buttons/stickers/activities for kids. Calendars (CAs; Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation etc).</p>
<p>5. Public events and activities</p>	<p>Include tree-planting, healthy hikes, natural playgrounds, support for environmental initiatives, parks and trails. Expand range of partners for "environmental" events to include health sector . Include communications pieces re human health. Urban and rural.</p>
<p>6. Policy</p>	<p>Work with existing provincial inter-ministerial committees to improve policy and planning framework. Encourage local application of knowledge through land use plans, natural heritage/forest strategies, development proposals, watershed report cards etc.</p>
<p>7. Research</p>	<p>Initiate research in collaboration with universities and others Focus on forest requirements for human health; cost-benefit analysis; ecosystem services; climate change adaptation etc.</p>
<p>8. Collaborative fundraising</p>	<p>To support any/all of the above. Might include: corporate sponsors/partners, foundations, CIHR, partner contributions (in-kind and funds).</p>

Role of the Public Health Sector

The Ontario Public Health Standards provide the conceptual framework and scope for public health in Ontario. Although some public health authorities are becoming engaged with activities that recognize the benefits of healthy watersheds and forests to their communities, most do not have the resources or mandate to get involved. There is also a tendency to see the individual pieces, such as air quality and drinking water sources, without thinking holistically about ecosystems. However we should remember that the WHO definition of health is a broad one that leads to consideration of the entire ecosystem.⁴

The broad perspectives we are taking here aren't generally on the public health radar screen, so how do we get traction with the public health profession? Can we re-shape the public health mandate? It may be most effective to showcase the work of the bright lights who are already working on natural environment issues with, for example, conservation authorities and forestry departments. This should help to demonstrate how this work can fit into the scope of the public health profession. We could also engage with the Health and Built Environment Workgroup of the Ontario Public Health Association.⁵

Other Sectors

In addition to public health units, other trusted sectors that have good interface with the public include municipal parks and recreation departments and conservation authorities.

The development sector could be a valuable ally if, for example, we build on the good work underway for LEED ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-Neighbourhood Development), and the early adopters such as Cornell. On the other hand, if we develop policy directions without their involvement, and there is a perception that the development industry could be negatively affected, they could mount serious opposition.

Several other groups and individuals were suggested for involvement in this initiative:

- Ontario Road Ecology Group, chaired by David Ireland, Royal Ontario Museum
- Dr Mowat, Peel Region MoH and Chair, Built Environment Health Group, David Suzuki Foundation
- Kate Manson-Smith, Ministry of Health, has responsibilities for health promotion
- Evergreen Foundation (expertise in marketing new ideas)
- Jennifer Shipper, Environics (public opinion)

Messages

There is an abundance of environmental messaging out there that is confusing and makes it difficult for people to focus on priority actions. We need to reduce the green noise by focusing on 3 or 4 strong, unified, evidence-based messages. We need to answer: What are we fighting for? Why? What is the professional consensus?

⁴ WHO definition: Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

⁵ See also *Public Health and Land Use Planning: Highlights*, April 2011 by Kim Perrotta. Prepared for the Clean Air Partnership in partnership with the Ontario Public Health Association.
http://www.opha.on.ca/resources/docs/CAP_PHLUP-Highlights-Apr2011.pdf

Money talks: we must address current economic concerns by showing how environmental initiatives can reduce economic costs of health care. Climate change may be another useful way to show linkages with health (e.g. extreme temperatures and heat stress can be ameliorated by shade trees). Watersheds are also seen as valuable settings for improving human health and engaging people in action at a scale that makes sense for both ecosystems and communities.

We could start with the shared values that were identified in the two-pager *Healthy Communities depend on Healthy Watersheds*:

- Interest in population and community health
- Well-being is a holistic concept
- Promote wellness and prevent illness and harm
- Importance of green infrastructure
- Effective leverage of scarce resources
- Address social and environmental determinants of health at multiple scales
- Climate change
- Ecosystem goods and services

Another starting point could be key health outcomes that are affected by environmental factors (e.g. cardiovascular, respiratory, diabetes, cancer, mental health). Or the focus could be on aspects of the environment such as air, water, nature, trees, trails, climate etc. The Ontario Biodiversity Strategy provides a good basis for "protecting what sustains us".

Once common messages have been developed, they can be adapted to target different audiences and employed in a variety of ways.

Tactics

We are talking about nothing less than a social movement. We need to involve experts in social change and public opinion (e.g. Environics) who can help us learn how to do this. We should also learn from existing experience, such as the ongoing work to connect public health concerns to the quality of built environments. It will be important to work with the early adopters and create "contagious commitment". Some specific suggestions:

- Community champions can be enlisted to help deliver key messages
- Seek partners, not just sponsors
- Get endorsements from the public health and medical professions
- Throw out the reductionism and focus on systems thinking
- Use creative communication techniques e.g. the Story of Stuff project⁶
- Create a working group on environment and health to report to the Ontario Biodiversity Council (16 ministries have now signed on to the Ontario Biodiversity Strategy)

Opportunities

The group identified some key upcoming opportunities to promote key messages about healthy people and ecosystems:

- The next municipal election in October 2014. We need to start preparing now "it offers a great opportunity to engage candidates and their communities"
- Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) annual conference in September 2013. A call for proposals will be issued soon with a February deadline

⁶ <http://www.storyofstuff.org/movies-all/story-of-change/>

- The Ontario Public Health Convention, April 2013, Toronto. Theme is "Reflection. Evaluation. Integration."⁷
- EcoHealth (International Association for Ecology and Health) conference, Montreal, 2014

Forum

Participants agreed that we should hold a forum to increase our network, find out "who's who" and what they're doing, get buy-in, and refine our common messages. We should avoid ppt presentations and focus on conversations leading towards shared outcomes, such as a position statement that could be endorsed by key sectors, leading to policies and activities to improve both human and environmental health.

Various techniques were proposed, including:

- Open Space Technology
- Michael Jones "a musician and facilitator (<http://www.pianoscapes.com>)"
- Posters/electronic media café
- The Natural Step

Next Steps

The group agreed that they wanted to continue working on activities that add value for all participants, over and above what they can do on their own or in smaller partnerships. They identified the following key actions for collaboration:

- Share the notes from this strategy session with the broader network
- Post *A Healthy Dose of Green* and the *Inventory of Complementary Activities* on-line and ask the broader network to contribute additional information
- Develop a "straw man" call to action with compelling, shared messages, for discussion with others
- Develop a collaborative communications strategy including tactics for different audiences
- By February, submit a proposal for a session at the OPPI conference in September 2013
- Participate in Ontario Public Health Convention in April 2013 to get feedback and endorsement
- Host a Forum for invitees from all sectors with a focus on sharing ideas, discussion and specific outcomes
- Participate in EcoHealth conference in 2014

⁷ TOPHC 2013 integration theme includes "bringing together the disparate but often complementary work of the public health community and those who perform and implement it, and collectively working towards a common goal of improving the public health and wellbeing of Ontarians; collaborating with our health and non-health sector partners"