

Mayor Rick Bonnette's Green Plan Task Force

Halton Hills - A Community of Leaders

By Marnie Hughes, Communication Artistry

When Mayor Rick Bonnette went online to peruse the daily newspapers, he noticed a dismaying trend within their pages. There was a consistent outcry about environmental issues affecting our planet. They may have been local, or they may have been global, but either way they were startlingly similar in their message: the environment is everyone's problem and we had better do something.

In June 2007, the Mayor put forward a motion that a Green Plan be developed for the Town of Halton Hills. He envisioned two things: first, "that the concept for a Green Plan imagines the Town of Halton Hills to be a community of leaders – not followers"; and second, that the plan be PAREE (practical, affordable, reasonable, enforceable and educational). With these parameters set, the Green Plan Task Force was formed.

With the formidable job ahead, the Task Force made the six month commitment of meeting every two weeks to develop a framework. The first order of business was for the group to assign sub-committees to focus on four areas: residents, schools & businesses, government & agencies, and the Town of Halton Hills. The group needed to assess the existing efforts of the Town by compiling a list of what initiatives are currently under way. To their delight, they discovered that the list of 3E's (exemplary environmental efforts) was extensive and included such things as lighting retrofits, installation of waste heat recovery systems, environmentally friendly cleaning products, waterless urinals, and energy efficient thermostats. Encouraged by what the Town was already doing, the Task Force brainstormed ideas and developed a comprehensive list of action items to further show leadership and commitment to a healthier environment.

This environmental philosophy plays a part when council is developing a bylaw. Even if a bylaw is difficult to enforce, it is still of value to have on the books as an educational tool. For example, a bylaw exists that prohibits leaving a car idling for more than three minutes in above freezing temperatures. This would be quite difficult to enforce. The fact that it exists, however, helps guide people toward making decisions that are in favour of the environment. The plan contains a checklist for residents offering tips to help them live a more 'green' lifestyle.

Any new buildings being commissioned by the Town will implement LEED standards. For example, the two new fire stations being built in Halton Hills will incorporate a geothermal heating system. This project, in partnership with Halton Hills Hydro, will mean at least 50 years of no fossil fuel emissions from these two buildings.

Out of the over 400 municipalities in Ontario, there is less than a handful who have a green plan. Not surprising when looking at the results of a recent Ipsos Reid poll that highlighted the fact that 1) the residents of Halton Hills are above average in our concern for the environment, and 2) limiting growth/urban sprawl is a top environmental issue to us - equal to safe drinking water and green space.

Now that the Green Plan has been developed, this is a guiding document that the Town can use to implement environmental initiatives on a continuous basis. In order to keep the momentum going, the Town will be looking to a staff person to head the “office of sustainability” to follow through and implement the plan. Also the Town Environment Advisory Committee will also play an important role in recommendations to the Town Green Plan.

Recommendations to businesses of Halton would be to take a look at what you’re already doing and see where you might go a little farther. You probably already have a blue box and recycle paper, cans and bottles. In addition, businesses can look at phasing out the use of plastic bags by offering recycling facilities for bags and providing sturdy, reusable ones. Businesses could also take a look at posting signs discouraging idling in pick up/drop off areas. If you haven’t already participated in the ‘porch light’ program, you could replace incandescent lights with compact fluorescents. Wherever possible, retailers can reduce packaging and restaurants could refrain from using Styrofoam cups.

The Green Plan has been widely distributed to all levels of government and to environmental groups such as the David Suzuki Foundation. Mayor Bonnette welcomes you to pick up your copy of the Green Plan at the town offices, the library, Gellert Center, or read it online at [haltonhills.ca/greenplan](http://haltonhills.ca/greenplan).