



Headwaters  
**Communities**  
*in Action*

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*Building A Better Quality of Life Together*

# **Building Momentum Report**

**June 22, 2006**

# Headwaters Communities in Action

## Who Are We?

**H**eadwaters Communities in Action has its roots in a dedicated group of health and social service providers in Dufferin County known as the Headwaters Linkages Committee. This group began meeting more than a decade ago to explore how they could better respond to the needs of the people of the region. In 2002, this group's thinking underwent a distinct shift with the recognition that a broader cross-section of community perspectives was needed in these dialogues.

After some initial research and many informal conversations with community leaders, this group identified the concept of social prosperity as an important focal point for its work. Social Prosperity is defined as a community's ability to:

- **Maintain a high quality of life and a good standard of living for its citizens.**
- **Provide access to employment opportunities, community services, health care, adequate housing and education.**

Our project's initial meeting, in November 2004 brought together sectors and leaders to create a shared sense of our region's current realities and develop a shared path for the future. Orangeville Mayor Drew Brown and business leaders and Rotarian Lynda Buffett from Shelburne were recruited to send personal invitations to leaders in our community's business, voluntary and government sectors.

Participants at this founding meeting found the event magical and couldn't remember a time when such a diversity of perspectives was brought together to plan. After a day of working together reviewing background research on the community and brainstorming about the future, the 54 community leaders in attendance agreed upon the following shared vision:

### Vision for Headwaters Communities in Action

**“Dufferin County will speak with one voice as we establish an integrated mechanism for social, economic and environmental planning in a way that respects historic continuity, maintains and protects the natural environment, coordinates and promotes services and establishes a sense of community for all of Dufferin County, so that we can enhance and celebrate the prosperity, health and well-being of the diverse citizens of our County.”**

Another key outcome of this founding meeting was the formation of a Project Steering Committee mandated to move this process forward. The Committee's members include:

### Steering Committee for Headwaters Communities in Action

<b>Ross Kirkconnell,</b> Community Care Access Centre of Wellington-Dufferin	<b>Rod Freeman,</b> Orangeville Police	<b>Bob Baynham,</b> Headwaters Health Care Centre
<b>Starr Olsen,</b> Community Living Dufferin	<b>Lynda Buffett,</b> Shelburne Rotarian	<b>Rob Rice,</b> Chamber of Commerce
<b>Barbara Horvath,</b> Independent Consultant	<b>Tim Murray</b> Upper Grand District School Board	<b>Holly Greenwood,</b> Project Facilitator
		<b>Sylvia Cheuy,</b> Project Manager

A key priority for the Steering Committee has been to broaden awareness of and engagement in the project's vision throughout the region. In support of this first task, the Steering Committee secured seed-funding from several committed local agencies and hired Sylvia Cheuy and Holly Greenwood on a part-time basis to assist in moving the project forward. Sylvia brings more than 12 years experience as a consultant whose strong analytical and facilitation skills have assisted community organizations in clarifying and implementing strategies to support transformational change. Holly has 14 years experience working with individuals and communities to build their capacity through her work in public health. Recognized as a skilled facilitator and educator, she takes a highly participatory and strengths-based approach. Both Sylvia and Holly have been trained in a number of facilitation methods that all use involvement and participation to consult on – and evaluate – community needs.

Since that time, our project has gratefully received investments from both **The Ontario Trillium Foundation** and **Service Canada** (formerly HRSDC) which has enabled us to host several public forums and education sessions including presentations to each of the 8 local councils in Dufferin County, the County Council, the Upper Grand District School Board, and a number of service clubs

Most recently we convened a series of Focused Action Planning sessions involving local knowledge experts in education, business; community health and well-being and the environment to enable us to refine the input from the public sessions into the specific recommendations for action outlined later in this report.

Throughout this consultation phase, the number of individuals who have helped clarify the initial vision has grown and participants have provided valuable input into the specific goals and initiatives that people believe would demonstrate social prosperity in our community and an implementation plan for achieving our shared vision has begun to take shape.

While we were initially known as **The Dufferin Social Prosperity Project**, feedback and input from community members has also been instrumental in establishing a new name for our project that simply conveys what we are trying to achieve.

## Core Values Guiding Headwaters Communities in Action

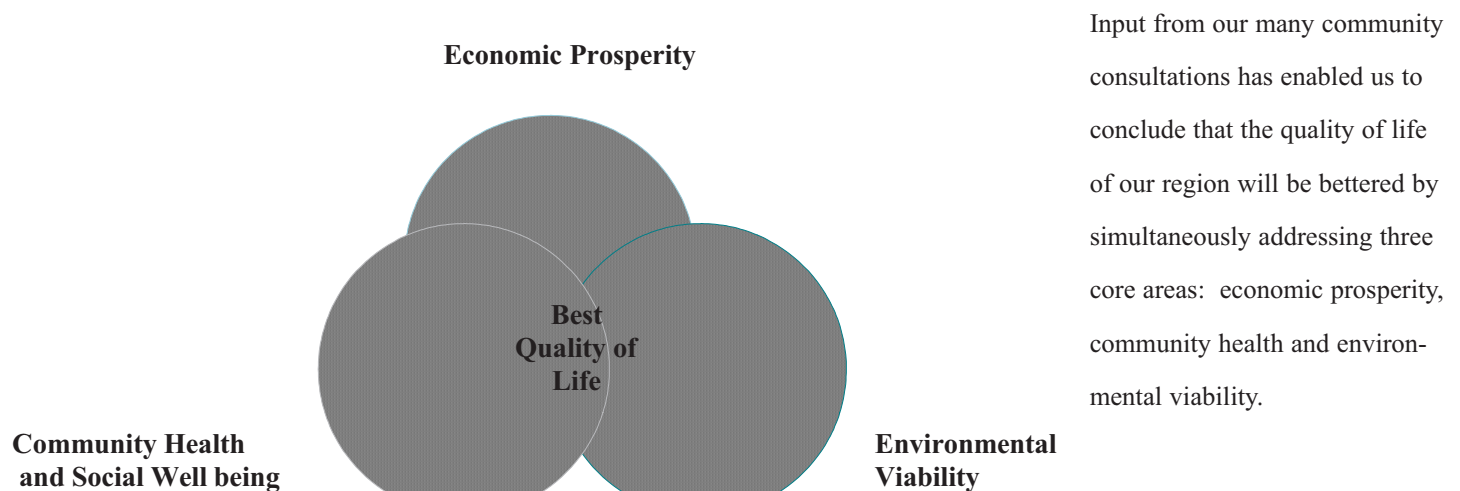
The work of **Headwaters Communities in Action** is guided by a set of values that express our commitment to how we want to work with one another and our various community partners in fulfilling our strategic directions, meeting our goals and realizing our vision. These values were generated from input received at our Community Action Planning Forum in October 2005.

1. **Inclusion and Accessibility** – We recognize the intrinsic value of all people and are committed to engaging all citizens in building the region's social prosperity
2. **Multi-Sector Collaboration** – We recognize that collaborating across various sectors in new ways is key to addressing complex community issues
3. **Sustainability** – We are committed to building upon existing community strengths and designing sustainable initiatives
4. **Innovation** – We will model and nurture creativity and innovation throughout the Headwaters Region
5. **Effectiveness** – We will monitor our progress, continuously learn and apply and share our learnings to ensure we are maximizing our resources

## What Are We Trying To Do?

Headwaters Communities in Action strives to attain the best quality of life for those who live and work in our communities. We do this by bringing people together across many sectors to explore new ways of mobilizing our region's assets to fulfill the vision created at our initial meeting.

The opportunity that our project offers is the ability to proactively unify behind a shared vision, develop plans to work collectively towards achieving it and ultimately ensure that our region is strong and vibrant both now and into the future.



This holistic approach to bettering our region's quality of life appreciates that how we work together is as important as what we choose to do. As one focus group participant shared with us, "strong communities have community trust, community norms and opportunities and occasions to work together. This project should emphasize these." This is what we mean when we say that we must utilize– and enhance – our region's social prosperity.

## Areas of Strategic Focus:

Input from stakeholders has helped further refine the direction of our efforts within each of these three areas of strategic focus to ensure that the efforts that we undertake in this plan will have maximum impact. Specifically, we intend to:

- To enhance our economic prosperity by ensuring that young people and adults have the educational opportunities that they need to secure meaningful employment.
- To enhance our social prosperity by ensuring that the health and well-being of our communities is the best it can be.
- To enhance our environmental viability through efforts which educate and engage all residents in protecting and responsibly growing our region's environmental assets

Interestingly, the three areas of strategic focus which emerged from our community consultations mirror what researchers have defined as sustainable communities, which have been described in the following way. "Sustainable communities are more environmentally sound, economically prosperous, and socially equitable. Fundamental to the concept of sustainable development is that it rests on three pillars – the social dimension, the economic dimension and the environmental dimension. For development to be sustainable, all three dimensions need to be addressed in a balanced and integrated way, with due regard given to meeting both present as well as future needs. The environmental, social and economic dimensions should thus be seen as mutually enforcing, interdependent entities of sustainability. In this context, health provides an important unifying theme in relation to the three pillars of sustainable development." (Rural Communities Impacting Policy, [www.ruralnovascotia.ca](http://www.ruralnovascotia.ca))

## Our Unique Approach

The Headwaters region has a long and proud history of community action and commitment. As leaders in this community, we have each worked to enhance our region from within our sectors and are committed to finding ways to ensure that our region thrives. What has intrigued us and engaged our commitment to **Headwaters Communities in Action** is the opportunity to do this work in a fundamentally new way.

We have come to appreciate that the answers to our region's most complex issues and challenges cannot be solved with "quick-fix" solutions. We also realize that no one sector can be effective addressing these issues in isolation. Fragmented thinking and action will only produce fragmented, partial solutions. We believe that to have the kind of strategic impact we need on our region's quality-of-life we need to find new, innovative and comprehensive ways of working together.

The wisdom of such an approach is echoed by many including Harvard Business Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who wrote that one of "the most important magnets in attracting and keeping investment and business" in today's global economy is a community's ability to bring people together to define the common good, create joint plans; and, identify strategies that benefit a wide range of people and organizations."

In embracing this approach, **Headwaters Communities in Action** joins the ranks of a growing number of communities who are embracing ... "locally based efforts that work to improve community conditions and the lives of individuals and families by working comprehensively across social, economic and physical sectors."



## Our Strengths as a Region

Much of this information comes from an environmental scan we prepared at the outset of our project. This scan identifies both our region's assets and challenges. Assets are those things that can be built upon when developing a plan for social prosperity. Our scan reveals that our regional assets include:

• An impressive array of services for a community of

its size

- A small-town feel but close to urban centres – the best of both worlds
- A strong sense of community and a high level of civic pride – with lots of community events
- A high quality hospital and health services
- Natural environment for recreation
- A safe community

## Key Challenges for our Region

The environmental scan also identified our region's key challenges. Challenges are those things that need to be addressed or reduced to strengthen the quality of life of our region. These challenges include:

- **Becoming a bedroom community with a high proportion of our population commuting to the GTA for employment. This makes it difficult for them to be engaged in community life and has a negative impact on health. The high percentage of commuters also has an impact on our local economy as research has shown that commuters are more likely to spend money where they work**
- **Lack of co-ordinated resources to support our voluntary sector at the same time that the service demands of a growing and changing population are increasing.**
- **A competitive environment for organizations providing primary health, social and children's services**
- **The need for planning in our human service delivery system (health, social services & education) to parallel "hard" infrastructure planning**
- **Economic disparities across the region**
- **A high proportion of our residents have less than a high school education and the percentage of regional residents with a University degree is almost 10% below the provincial average.**
- **A high proportion of youth who are not completing high school**
- **A lack of affordable rental housing**
- **Few transportation alternatives to the automobile**

## Ideas for Achieving Our Vision

Throughout May 2006, a series of focused action planning sessions were held with community leaders and topic experts to explore what the community needed to address within each of the three areas of strategic focus: economic prosperity, community health and environmental viability in order to significantly impact quality of life in the region. Participants in all of the focus groups unanimously identified:

- The need for some structures to support our region in working together in a more collaborative way; and,
- A number of specific high impact projects that influenced change within specific areas of strategic focus.

### Creating the Foundation for Multi-Sector Collaboration:

In order to achieve the vision of **Headwaters Communities in Action**, and to have a long-term, sustainable impact on our region's quality of life and prosperity, community members believed that it was critical to create the following structures and processes to provide a foundation for working together in a new way in this region.

**Regional Community Planning Process:** While Dufferin County is one of the smaller counties in Ontario both physically and population-wise, we lack a clear, shared plan for the future of our region. Our fragmentation is echoed in many ways throughout our community and is a real disadvantage to us in planning for our future. For example:

- It hinders our ability to proactively identify what new industries we want to attract to the region and how to do it.
- It limits the ability of our service agencies to speak strongly about the needs of our region. This is particularly important for those organizations who sit at planning tables that span jurisdictions that include larger neighboring areas such as Peel or Wellington.

While the recent establishment of a County-wide economic development Committee is a critically important step in addressing this fragmentation, community leaders and knowledge experts have told us there is a need for a comprehensive, regional planning process that addresses economic, environmental and community health issues in a coordinated way to ensure the best quality of life of citizens in this region.

**Structure to Coordinate Local Fundraising:** Many of our smaller service agencies compete individually for funds generated by our local service clubs and businesses. Also, these same agencies often struggle in isolation to compete against larger and better organized jurisdictions for a dwindling pool of government resources. As a result of chronic under funding in this region, there is little capacity for organizations to take on new projects or increase the services currently provided. Coordinated local fundraising was identified as a solution to these issues. This could take the form of a community endowment or foundation that generates funds to support strategic local projects or to support coordinated planning between organizations on high impact projects that strengthen the quality-of-life of our region.

**A Resource to Enhance Organizational Capacity:** Many not for profit organizations and groups struggle to sustain themselves and

to access the needed data, skills and services to maintain their long-term viability. Focus group participants identified the need for a centralized community resource where organizations could access the resources and data that they need to build and sustain their capacity.

**Community Convener: Headwaters Communities in Action** has convened community conversations to identify the assets and challenges affecting this region for the purpose of developing a community action plan. Community leaders and knowledge experts acknowledged that there is a need for the continued role of a community convener to facilitate movement forward on the foundational structures and projects identified through the focus groups. **Headwaters Communities in Action** is committed to continuing its role as a convener until other formal structures or mechanisms are put in place.

### Specific Projects that Impact the Strategic Focuses:

The following projects were identified by community members as having a significant impact on improving the quality of life within this region. Each of these projects will affect change in at least two of the three areas of strategic focus...economic prosperity, community health and social well being, and environmental viability.

**Regional Trails Network:** While many of us treasure the “green space” of our region and see its tourist potential, this natural asset is underutilized because we currently lack a comprehensive regional trail system or a coordinated strategy to create one. Although we have a number of committed trails groups in Dufferin County, they are primarily working independently of each other. Unlike the regions surrounding us, Dufferin County does not have a regional trail network to coordinate planning and access to resources. There is potential to develop the recently acquired CNR land corridor into a trail system, and to connect Dufferin County trails to those in surrounding areas. Convening trail leaders to establish a “Headwaters Trail Alliance” with a mandate to develop a co-ordinated, long-term plan for trail development throughout the region would improve our chances of success in securing government and philanthropic financing to support trail development, to organize community events that promote trail use for local citizens, and attract eco-tourists to the benefit of our local businesses.

**Youth Engagement Strategy/Youth Summit:** Consistently over the past year, participants in our community consultations want to know what youth need to see happen in this community in order to support them in reaching their potential. There is also a desire to better understand how to make this region an attractive place for them to work and raise their families in the future. A positive development for this region is the plan to open the Humber College campus. Humber College has been engaging actively in researching the post secondary educational needs of this community and the educational interests of local youth. However, more active engagement of youth and the opportunity to give them a strong voice in regional planning discussions is needed. To this end, there was significant interest generated in the ideas of creating a youth engagement strategy that includes a youth summit.

**Best Practices on Affordable Housing:** Affordable housing is becoming an issue of increasing concern in this region since the eradication of national and provincial affordable housing projects. With the increasing costs of living, residents, especially renters, are using a higher percentage of their income to cover housing costs. Social service agencies are seeing the evidence of rising poverty with their clientele: increased use of food banks, inability to provide their children with access to recreational opportunities, stress and mental health issues. We have a five year waiting list for subsidized housing and there is a segment of our population that is either homeless, or precariously housed. Habitat for Humanity has done important work in addressing these issues and focus group participants felt that their work could be strengthened by developing a deeper understanding of affordable housing issues in our region by learning from the successes of other communities through research on best practices in affordable housing.

**Citizen Education and Engagement:** In all of the focus groups, participants identified citizen lack of awareness of the key issues affecting the quality of their life as a barrier to building political will for collective change. They felt there was a need to engage grassroots citizens in discussions around these issues as a means of encouraging their participation in the political process. Also, people felt that we needed to further educate and engage those who are already contributing to the strength of this community so that they can become champions of the ideas identified as critical to affecting significant change in our quality of life in Dufferin County.

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**Headwaters Communities in Action** recommends that as a community we attend to both the foundational structures for working collaboratively as a region as well as implementing specific project ideas. The specific project ideas will provide some immediate improvements to our quality of life in this region. However it is the foundational structures that will support us in having a sustainable impact on the region's economic and social prosperity by establishing a new way of working together. This will enable us to continuously assess and meet the emerging needs of this community in order to fundamentally transform our region's quality-of-life.

On June 22, 2006, we are asking for feedback on the key ideas outlined above and to seek input on how we can work together to take action on these ideas. **Headwaters Communities in Action** is dedicated to facilitating the process of bringing people together from across diverse sectors, stimulating conversation, identifying challenges and keeping us all collectively focused on our shared vision for the region. But the actual projects and strategies to achieve the vision will not come from us. They will come from you – and the deep knowledge and wisdom you hold.

With your input, we hope to articulate an implementation strategy by the Fall of 2006 in a Community Action Plan. To successfully move forward in implementing these ideas will require the will and effort of community members. In partnership with other concerned residents, how can **you** improve quality-of-life for residents of the Headwaters region?

There are many ways that you can make a contribution:

- **Become a member of an expanded Leadership Roundtable as we move into the implementation phase**
- **Join a working group around any one of the ideas described in this report**
- **Engage your organization to become a partner in supporting the completion of a Community Action Plan and being part of its implementation.**
- **Become a financial investor in the implementation of these ideas.**
- **Volunteer your skills and strengths to Headwaters Communities in Action**

# Imagine the Possibilities



## A Regional Planning Process

**Imagine...** Leaders from every sector working together to create a clear plan for our future which balances economic, social and environmental considerations in an integrated way.

## Coordinated Local Fundraising

**Imagine...** Creating a permanent local endowment to fund strategic projects that strengthen the quality-of-life of our region.

## A Resource to Enhance Organizational Capacity

**Imagine...** Readily available research and data about the Headwaters Region and our needs...a centralized resource that helps organizations access the information, skills and services they need to fulfill their mandates and sustain themselves.

## A Community Convenor

**Imagine...** Community leaders, knowledge experts and concerned citizens from across the region being brought together regularly to participate in facilitated conversations around important issues impacting the economic, social and environmental well-being of our region and identifying strategies and action plans to address them.

## A Regional Trails Network

**Imagine...** A regional network of trails that provides walkers and cyclists with easy access to the natural beauty of the Headwaters Region, encourages physical activity and acts as an important magnet for tourism and recreation.

## A Youth Summit

**Imagine...** Youth leaders being supported to engage youth from across the region in a process that encourages them to articulate their vision for the future and helps them to identify the barriers and resources to realizing it.

## Best Practices on Affordable Housing

**Imagine...** Adequate, affordable housing being available to each and every individual and/or family in the region.

## Citizen Education and Engagement

**Imagine...** Citizens being aware of, and engaged in, discussions about key issues related to the economic, social and environmental well-being of our region.