



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development – Relationship to the Toronto Environment Office

Date:	August 20, 2007
To:	Parks & Environment Committee
From:	Richard Butts, Deputy City Manager
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:\2007\ClusterB\PPFA\TEO\PE07009

SUMMARY

At the request of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, the Toronto Environment Office has facilitated the establishment of the Toronto Regional Centre for Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (the “Toronto RCE”). The Toronto RCE is part of an international network of Regional Centres of Expertise affiliated with the United Nations University Institute for Advanced Studies, based in Yokohama, Japan. The Regional Centres of Expertise are one way that the United Nations is promoting the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

The Toronto RCE is providing a forum for school boards, universities, colleges, government and non-governmental organizations to share information and experiences on education for sustainable development, and to promote partnerships in the delivery of programs. In June 2007, the Steering Committee further refined its objectives by deciding to focus its efforts on enhancing existing and proposing new education initiatives that support implementation of the City of Toronto’s Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan.

This report explains the relationship between the Toronto RCE and the mandate of the Toronto Environment Office, and recommends that the Toronto Environment Office report back to Parks & Environment Committee in July 2009 on the Toronto RCE’s progress. It also recommends that the Toronto Environment Office investigate how the City can offset the environmental impacts of participation in national and international networks like the United Nations University network of Regional Centres of Expertise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Deputy City Manager recommends that:

1. the Toronto Environment Office report back to Parks & Environment Committee in July 2009 on the progress of the Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development; and
2. the Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development be the focal point for meeting Council's request made at its July 2007 meeting that the Deputy City Manager develop a School Board/City Environmental Education Working Group to review current environmental curriculum and activities and explore opportunities for collaboration on environmental initiatives.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact associated with this report, beyond what is already approved in the current year's operating budget. The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer have reviewed this report and agree with the financial impact statement.

DECISION HISTORY

At its July 16th, 2007 meeting, City Council endorsed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding establishing the Toronto RCE, and committing the Toronto Environment Office to provide office space and staff support for the Toronto RCE for an initial period of two years. Council also approved Parks & Environment Committee's request that the Director of the Toronto Environment Office provide additional information on:

- a) a permanent site for the Toronto RCE office in the event that the Centre continues longer than two years;
- b) the feasibility of global conferencing as an alternative to replace air travel for meetings; and
- c) how the Toronto Environment Office and United Nations Regional Centre of Expertise complement each other.

Also of note is Council's direction, from its July 16th, 2007 meeting, that the Deputy City Manager develop a School Board/City Environmental Education Working Group to review current environmental curriculum and activities and explore opportunities for collaboration on environmental initiatives

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/cc/decisions/2007-07-16-cc11-dd.pdf>).

ISSUE BACKGROUND

In May 2005, the Mayor wrote to the United Nations University and requested that Toronto be recognized as a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development. RCEs are being established around the world on the initiative of the United Nations University as a way of realizing the objectives of the International Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). The goal of the Decade is to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. The importance of education for sustainable development is recognized in Agenda 21, the comprehensive plan of action that emerged from the 1992 Earth Summit.

Subsequent to the Mayor's letter, Toronto was acknowledged as an RCE, and the Toronto Environment Office provided a briefing to the Deputy Mayor and the Roundtable on the Environment on what would be involved in establishing the Toronto RCE (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2005/agendas/committees/ren/ren050922/it007.pdf>).

An initial meeting of educational institutions, environmental non-governmental organizations, business, and social groups, was held in April 2006 to ascertain interest in establishing an RCE in Toronto. As a result, a Steering Committee for the Toronto RCE was formed, with Dr. Ingrid Stefanovic, Director of the University of Toronto's Centre for Environment, serving as Chair. For a complete list of Steering Committee members, please see attachment 'A'.

In June 2007, the Toronto RCE Steering Committee met to decide on a focal point for its future activities. It was decided that the City of Toronto's Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan would be the focal point of the Toronto RCE's activities, especially in terms of strengthening educational initiatives in Toronto so that they support achieving the objectives of that plan.

COMMENTS

Permanent Site for the Toronto RCE

At this time, the Toronto RCE is not intended to be a physical structure or facility. Rather, the Toronto RCE operates as an alliance of existing institutions and organizations engaged in education for sustainable development. The Memorandum of Understanding approved by City Council in July 2007 commits the Toronto Environment Office—for a period of two years—to fulfilling a secretariat role in coordinating the meetings and activities of the Toronto RCE.

As recommended in this report, the Toronto Environment Office is proposing to report back to the Parks & Environment Committee in 2009, including an assessment of the need for a permanent site for the Toronto RCE.

Relationship to the Toronto RCE

The Toronto Environment Office has a mandate to be the environmental policy development and coordinating unit for the City. Included within this mandate are efforts to develop and build inter-agency and community partnerships for addressing the environmental goals and objectives of City Council. The Toronto RCE is one of those partnerships.

At its July 2007 meeting, City Council requested that the Deputy City Manager develop a school board/City environmental education working group to review current environmental curriculum and activities and explore opportunities for collaboration on environmental initiatives. The Toronto RCE, whose establishment was facilitated by the Toronto Environment Office, will fulfill this direction of City Council and will serve as a forum to identify collaborative opportunities between the City, the school boards, the universities and colleges and other partners.

It is also important to note that several of the Toronto RCE members participated in the Province's Working Group on Environmental Education, chaired by Dr. Roberta Bondar. Her report was released in June 2007, and, if implemented, will see a significant strengthening of the environmental curriculum in Ontario schools.

Global Conferencing

The Toronto Environment Office has written to the United Nations University and requested that video-conferencing, teleconferencing, and web-casting be considered as alternatives to air travel for international meetings.

In addition to the Toronto RCE, there are a number of national and international networks in which the City of Toronto participates (e.g., ICLEI, Great Lakes St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, etc.). Full participation in these networks often requires air travel, which has negative environmental impacts. However,

video conferencing and teleconferencing can sometimes be used to avoid the need for air travel.

CONTACT

Kim Peters
Senior Environmental Planner
Toronto Environment Office
Tel: 416-392-1848
E-mail: kpeters@toronto.ca

Richard Butts, Deputy City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 'A': List of Toronto RCE Steering Committee Members

Attachment 'A'

Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development

Steering Committee Members

July 2007

Organization	Representative
Toronto RCE Chair/ University of Toronto	Ingrid Stefanovic Director, Centre for Environment
Citizens' Environment Watch	Mary McGrath Executive Director
City of Toronto Toronto Environment Office	Mark Bekkering Acting Manager, Environmental Planning & Support
Environment Canada Public Education & Outreach	Susan Kingsbury Senior Strategies Advisor
Education Alliance for a Sustainable Ontario	Merebeth Switzer Co-Chair, Education Alliance for a Sustainable Ontario
Seneca College Centre for the Built Environment	Gary Johnson Professor
Toronto & Region Conservation Watershed Management Division	Renee Jarrett Senior Manager, Education
Toronto District School Board	David Rowan Associate Director of Education
Toronto Zoo Conservation Education & Research	William Rapley Executive Director, Conservation, Education & Research
York University Faculty of Environmental Studies	Peter Timmerman Professor
York University Faculty of Education	Steve Alsop Associate Dean