



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development

Date:	September 29, 2009
To:	Parks & Environment Committee
From:	Lawson Oates, Director Toronto Environment Office
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:\2009\Cluster B\TEO\PE09010

SUMMARY

The United Nations General Assembly designated 2005-2014 as the International Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. As part of this initiative the United Nations University (UNU) established an international network of Regional Centres of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development. Toronto was selected as a Regional Centre of Expertise in 2005.

To facilitate Toronto's participation various organizations, including the City of Toronto, came together and formed the Toronto RCE. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was developed and, in July 2007, City Council endorsed the City's involvement for a two-year period.

Over the last two years, the Toronto RCE initiated work to identify gaps in areas of action on education for sustainable development and identify best practices for sharing within Toronto and the larger international RCE network. One of the outcomes of this work was a conclusion that there is a lot of valuable and innovative work already occurring in Toronto. Much of that work being done collaboratively by the organizations engaged in the Toronto RCE.

In May 2009, the signatories to the MOU identified that the value of maintaining the Toronto RCE as a stand alone formal organization is limited and voted to suspend all further activities and formally withdraw from the UNU's RCE program. It was felt that the goal of the Toronto RCE had been achieved and existing relationships and partnerships had been strengthened and would continue to evolve and develop without the need of a formal organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director of the Toronto Environment Office recommends that:

1. City Council receive the decision of the signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding for the Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development to suspend, effective May 20, 2009, all further activities, and advise the United Nations University's program for Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development of this decision;
2. City Council extend its sincere appreciation to Dr. Ingrid Stefanovic, Professor and Director, Centre for the Environment, University of Toronto, for chairing on a voluntary basis the Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development; and
3. the Director of the Toronto Environment Office continue to engage the member bodies of the Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development in the ongoing development and implementation of the City's climate change mitigation programs and related environmental initiatives.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

In the spring of 2004, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution marking 2005-2014 as the International Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (more information at http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27234&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html). As a result, the United Nations University proposed establishing Regional Centres of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) around the world. The RCEs are intended to be a forum for strengthening local and international collaboration on education for sustainable development (http://www.ias.unu.edu/sub_page.aspx?catID=108&ddlID=183).

In March 2005, the Mayor wrote to the United Nations University requesting that Toronto be included in the international network of Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development. Toronto received this recognition in May 2005.

Following this selection, development of the Toronto RCE started in September 2006 when former Deputy City Manager Fareed Amin hosted a one-day forum of interested stakeholders (<http://www.toronto.ca/esd/forum.htm>). In subsequent follow-up meetings, a MOU and project ideas for the Toronto RCE were developed by those stakeholders.

In July 2007, City Council endorsed the MOU and the City's involvement in the Toronto RCE for a two-year period and the Director of the Toronto Environment Office was tasked with providing regular updates on the work of the Toronto RCE (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/pe/bgrd/backgroundfile-5195.pdf>).

The first status report was presented to City Council in October 2008 (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/pe/bgrd/backgroundfile-15997.pdf>).

ISSUE BACKGROUND

This report informs City Council of the continuing work of the Toronto RCE and advises City Council that in May 2009, the parties to the MOU decided to not renew the MOU and officially end the Toronto RCE as a formal body. However, all parties agreed to continue informally the many partnerships and relationships that developed as a result of this initiative.

COMMENTS

The primary goal for the Toronto's RCE, as agreed to by the various stakeholders, is to strengthen communication, coordination and collaboration among education for sustainable development stakeholders in the Toronto region. The following organizations were signatories to the MOU:

- City of Toronto
- University of Toronto
- York University
- Seneca College
- Toronto District School Board
- Citizens' Environment Watch
- Environment Canada
- Education Alliance for a Sustainable Ontario (EASO)
- Toronto Zoo
- Toronto & Region Conservation Authority

The Toronto Environment Office provided the initial secretarial and logistics support to facilitate the early work of the Toronto RCE. The Chair of the Toronto RCE was Professor Ingrid Stefanovic of the University of Toronto's Centre for the Environment.

One of the first things initiated by the Toronto RCE was the development of a database of sustainable development education activities occurring in Toronto. The purpose of this work was to identify potential gaps and areas of future focus for the Toronto RCE.

Examples of the initiatives already occurring and well established in Toronto are:

- **EcoSchools** - is a Green Toronto Award winning environmental program of the School Boards that addresses both the operation of the schools and what the students learn. Currently there are close to 400 schools in Toronto certified as an EcoSchool;
- **ReWire** – is an initiative of the University of Toronto’s Sustainability Office that employs community based social marketing techniques to encourage positive behaviour changes to reduce energy consumption in student residences and other university facilities; and
- **Sustainable Enterprise Academy** – is an executive education program delivered through the Schulich School of Business at York University designed to assist business in the transformation to corporate sustainability by providing senior executives with the vision, tools and support necessary to champion sustainable development.

More recent examples of where the City of Toronto is engaged in working in partnership on formal and informal education initiatives are:

- **greenSenseZ** – an innovative program where the City has partnered with the School Boards and Planet in Focus to create an initiative where children in grades 7 to 12 are given the opportunity to participate in a week long video production March break camp and produce a 30 second video about what they feel it means to live green;
- **Sustainability Map** – an initiative that emerged in part through the Toronto RCE, this project has the City, Ryerson University and Citizens’ Environment Watch working on the development of an interactive web based tool that residents and visitors will be able to access to learn about all the exciting environmental initiatives occurring in Toronto;
- **Urban Food Production** – a collaborative of the City, York University and the TDSB this initiative has developed a proposal for establishing a small scale farm at a High School and integrating its operation the curriculum; and
- **2010 Canadian Golf Open** – a collaborative initiative of the St. George’s Golf and Country Club, the City of Toronto and the TDSB’s EcoSchools program, which is engaging school children to help facilitate environmental certification of St. George’s, the home of the 2010 Canadian Golf Open.

As the Toronto RCE continued with its identification and discussion of existing initiatives and collaborative work, it became apparent that the goal of the Toronto RCE which is to strengthen coordination, communication and collaboration was somewhat redundant. It was concluded that there is a lot of valuable and innovative work already occurring in Toronto in the area of education for sustainable development. Much of that work is being done collaboratively by the organizations engaged in the Toronto RCE.

In May 2009, the signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding for the Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development identified as a group that the value of maintaining the Toronto RCE as a stand-alone organization is limited and voted to suspend all further activities and withdraw from the UNU's RCE program. It was felt that the goal of the Toronto RCE had been achieved and existing relationships and partnerships had been strengthened and that they would continue to evolve and develop. The City of Toronto will continue to engage the member bodies of the Toronto RCE in the ongoing development and implementation of the City's Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan, in addition to the existing and evolving projects mentioned earlier in this report.

CONCLUSION

Based on the decision of the members of the Toronto Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCE) to suspend all further activities and withdraw from the United Nations University's Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development program, this report recommends that: City Council endorse the decision of the RCE; thank the Chair, Professor Ingrid Stefanovic, for her work; and request the Director of the Toronto Environment Office to continue to engage the members of the Toronto RCE in ongoing development and implementation of the City's climate change and related environmental initiatives.

CONTACT

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Lawson Oates
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ATTACHMENT

Attachment A: Letter from Dr. Ingrid Stefanovic, Chair of the Toronto RCE advising the Mayor of Toronto of the decision of the Toronto RCE members to not renew the Memorandum of Understanding.