

## PREPARING FOR LARGE VOCAL MEETINGS

So you're expecting from 500 to 1,000 vocal residents at your next meeting? How do you prepare?

The overall intent of good public consultation is to provide the meaningful transmission of information between those who are proposing change, and those who are the recipients of change, often local residents and businesses. Ideally, this involves a thoughtful and mutually interactive dialogue where both sides can learn and decisions can be formed.

However, good consultation doesn't mean that all sides have to agree. Realistically, there are times when communities move fairly quickly to solidify their position, resulting in them actively rejecting not only the project or the planned policy, but even dialogue with the proponent. Nevertheless, the responsibility lies with the proponent to solicit public input, even if these comments are loud and determined. When this happens, the goal of public consultation and facilitation shifts toward manag-

ing the conversation in a way that provides a safe and comfortable environment for all parties, while ensuring information is shared, and received, by all concerned.

In the case of the City of Toronto's St. Clair West TTC expansion project, large numbers of local residents and businesses didn't hesitate to offer their various perspectives, which ranged from radically in favour of the project to vehemently opposed. Hardy Stevenson and Associates was asked to facilitate the community meetings and to provide consultation advice to the lead consultant Marshall Macklin Monaghan, TTC staff and City of Toronto staff.

During the extensive consultation process, which lasted for much of 2003 and 2004, we facilitated many meetings of more than 300 people in an effort to effectively capture the interests of both local community members and all interested Torontonians. Because of the scope of the process, we revisited the rules for facilitat-

ing large public meetings. These include the following:

- **Opinions and emotions will build over the course of a large meeting.** You must be cognizant of this as you think about establishing your agenda.
- **Large groups of citizens just won't sit and listen to long presentations.** Allow participants equal time to express their views as well as to learn. You are more effective when information is presented as responses to questions.

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### Now Joining our Team

Hardy Stevenson and Associates is pleased to announce the addition of four new employees to our team:

**Sari Liem** (Hons) MA PL., is a Community Planner with considerable experience in public consultation, human services, policy development and environmental planning.

**Catherine Beck**, MA M.C.I.P., R.P.P., is an Interdisciplinary Planner concentrating on socio-economic impact assessment, as well as land use analysis and public consultation within Environmental Assessment processes.

**Pam Foster**, (Hons) MA PL., is an Environmental Planner with experience in land-use planning, community planning and consultation.

**Loren Polonsky**, AICP, MA Urban Planning, is a Public Consultation Specialist and Urban Planner, with a focus on infrastructure approvals.

Welcome aboard!



Local residents and business owners were eager to voice their perspectives during recent public consultation meetings to discuss the St. Clair West TTC expansion

## PLANNING LINEAR FACILITIES - Success comes from early consideration of social and environmental matters

Hardy Stevenson and Associates has been fortunate to be involved with the planning, design, construction and environmental assessment of dozens of transmission lines, roadways and pipelines.

One thing all these projects have had in common is that as linear facilities they have had the potential to affect a variety of different natural and socio-economic environments. Well-planned linear facilities begin early with a strategic phase of systematically identifying broad corridors — alternative rights of way — that will ultimately lead to the selection of preferred alternatives.

The most successful right of way exercises involve a thorough analysis of environmental and social baselines, so that the project team knows exactly what's on the ground, often times more intimately than do local residents.

The process also allows the project team to become aware of areas where corridor and route alternatives are feasible and where they are not, and to remain open to considering alternative alignments where required. There must also be a true commitment to examining other options and alternatives recommended by government agencies and residents. To ensure a successfully planned linear facility, it's also crucial that the project team consider in advance the affects of the proposed route on farms, ecosystems, residential areas and businesses. They

must also be willing to address resident concerns, including typical questions such as what happens to me if a pipeline comes near my house? Will it be safe? What about my property values? Will it separate me from the rest of my community? Will I be compensated if it crosses my land? In these situations, effective teams have ensured that property agents, health and safety experts and community planners are included in early community meetings to address resident concerns with sensitivity and expertise. In our experience, the earlier the better.



Thorough public consultation before construction of new pipelines can help avoid significant community concerns (Willow Beach Project, Georgina Township)

In planning linear facilities, most environmental assessment processes will utilize standard criteria for weighing and ranking the best route alternatives. Those processes that are the most successful involve strategic thinking to anticipate potential community concerns in advance. They are also fully prepared to respond to community questions openly, and will consider all the alternative rights of way before reaching a decision. We also recommend the development of a community relations program for the construction phase that has “complaints avoidance” as a deliverable.

Ultimately, the rationale for selecting a particular pipeline route may not always be accepted by all concerned parties. However, when there has been a well-researched, inclusive process, all parties involved typically understand why the route has been selected.

## Checks and Balances: The Growing Role of Peer Review in Environmental Assessment

In academic circles, peer review is an integral part of defensible and traceable research. In the practical world of environmental assessments (EA), most proponents often conduct their studies with little scrutiny from their peers. And, despite the potential for direct impact on communities and the natural environment, funding for a peer review is often an after thought, if considered at all.

Having participated in numerous peer reviews over the past 15 years, Hardy Stevenson and Associates understands that a properly executed peer review gives the study process a significant advantage, while bringing additional credibility to the work completed by the EA proponent.

### Review Before the EA

While peer review teams should not be involved in the actual data collection, analysis or writing, it should review draft reports before they are finalized, potentially providing a different perspective on technical issues. This process offers the chance to catch oversights, validate assumptions and test the rigour of the study process before the work of the proponent is completed.

A peer review team can also be important in helping to bridge the communication gap between the proponent and the public. Because EA studies are typically the realm of planners, engineers and scientists, the process is often very technical, so much so that members of the public and non-technical individuals who lack the scientific knowledge and understanding may not feel comfortable contributing comments.

If unable to understand the technical data, public participants can become mistrustful of the proponent and the EA study. A peer review process can therefore help by creating an environment

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## Creating Community Commitment To Groundwater Protection

Ontario finances counties, regions and local municipalities to conduct groundwater studies. The initiative and funding support is a direct result of the Walkerton Commission, and requires municipalities to map sources of water for municipal wells.

Groundwater — water that is deep under the earth's surface in rock or layers of rock and including underground lakes — may be quite distant from where the well has been drilled. Geoscientists specialize in studying groundwater flow and how contaminants can migrate into the subsurface and impact on local water supplies. Understanding the geology and hydrogeology of a study area is the first step towards protecting groundwater in any community. Water contamination may be the result of pesticide or toxic material spills many kilometres from the wellhead. Pesticide leaks down through fissures in the rock and contaminates the water, and may eventually contaminate drinking water.

The Timmins, Iroquois Falls and Black River-Matheson Groundwater Study which took place in 2003 and 2004 was led by AMEC hydrogeologist Tim McBride, and R.J. Burnside and their hydrogeologists Peter Rider and Dave Hopkins. Joe Evers was retained by the three municipalities as Project Manager for the Regional Groundwater Study. Hardy Stevenson and Associates supported the team with public consultation, land-use policy advice and communications.

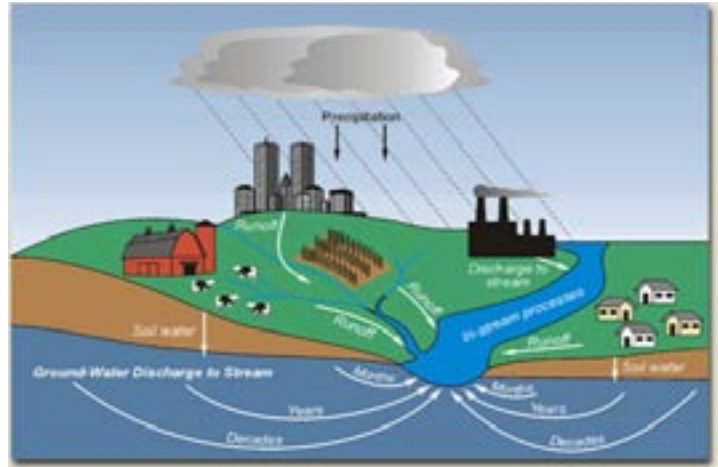
In designing our consultation and communications strategy we realized that it would be a challenge to create significant public interest in the complex matter of underground hydrogeology, despite the fact that the results of the study would be essential to public health. We also realized that a necessary element of our strategy would be to create a strong understanding among local residents

and businesses of the importance of groundwater safety, thereby encouraging good environmental stewardship.

Because of these factors, we did two unique things in our communications and consultation process. First, we enlisted the media as a partner in the communications process. Not only did we invite the media to public consultation centres and follow up all information requests, we wrote numerous press releases, assisted with photo shoots and props, granted media interviews, and made available non-technical language media kits to clearly explain the groundwater study process. As a result, we received considerable positive media attention through TV, radio and newspapers.

Second, we decided to reach out to the community directly in order to facilitate public education. We did this by distributing an easy-to-read newsletter to residents of all three communities, and by providing informative videos of how several U.S. communities are collaborating on an ongoing basis to protect groundwater.

Overall, we received very positive support from the Steering Committee. The outcome was also beneficial to all concerned parties. Our hydrogeologist team left the community with accurate groundwater mapping, as well as with policies that could be adopted to protect groundwater in the future. Meanwhile, the communities were left with a greater commitment by residents to long-term groundwater protection.



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where members of the public have a set of their own experts they can trust to “translate” material into common language.

### Key Lessons

There are several factors that can make a peer review process more effective. These include the following:

- **Promoting regular, face-to-face communication** between the EA proponent and the peer review team.
- **Encouraging an open exchange of information** between the peer review team and the public. The public will be more receptive to talking frankly and sharing valuable local knowledge with the peer review team, while the team can help explain technical issues associated with the EA study.
- **Involving the peer review team early on in the EA study**, allowing them to comment on the proposed workplan and methodology rather than simply critiquing the results.

Despite concerns that a peer review process can lengthen a schedule and add to costs, a well conducted peer review can ultimately provide value to proponents undertaking environmental assessments. For proponents it allows issues to be identified early, when changes can still be made to EA documents.

# Incorporating Human Services Policies into Regional and Municipal Official Plans

Professional planners and human service professionals such as police, social workers and affordable housing providers have always had an integral relationship. Eighteenth century social reformers who fought disease and improved urban health greatly benefited the urban planning profession. Land-use planners have always implicitly understood that their policy recommendations are designed to improve the quality of life for residents.

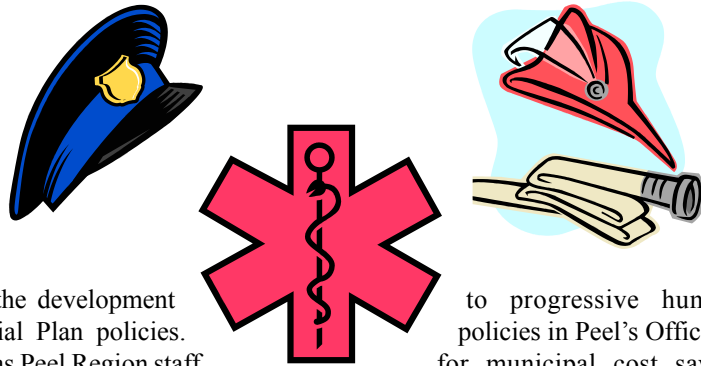
Today, human services costs often occupy a large percentage of regional and municipal budgets, for policing, social welfare, housing and transit. For this reason, when municipalities and regions include human service strategies and policies in their Official Plans, there can be both financial and quality of life benefits to all concerned stakeholders.

Hardy Stevenson and Associates was fortunate to be able to support Peel Region's recent review of its Human Services Strategy and policies in its new Official Plan. Our job was to support the development of policies by facilitating a meaningful dialogue with stakeholders and ensuring sound policy rationales.

To ensure that all concerned parties fully understood and were included in the process, we facilitated a Human Services Planning Workshop to examine and

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- **Safety and security is a priority.** Liaise with AV people and facilities staff to learn how lighting works. Have a plan in place to address a fire alarm being pulled. Ensure that fire exits are well marked, security staff are on hand, and that there are additional staff available to assist citizens if necessary. Also remember to have a cell phone handy in case of emergencies.
- **Don't overlook seemingly minor details** such as having a larger PA system. Ensure that these organizational details are planned in advance.
- **The consultation ground rules must**



discuss the development of Official Plan policies. As well as Peel Region staff, approximately 65 representatives from human services agencies, non-government organizations, faith groups, regional department and stakeholders from a variety of organizations and municipal service sectors were in attendance.

Overall, the workshop results provided a sound basis for newly established partnership links between the public, private and non-profit sectors, while recognizing the need for on-going communication and coordination of services. The workshop also helped identify current human services issues and impacts that will be facing Peel Region in the future.

As a result of this process, Peel Region was able to ensure that new policies met public and political scrutiny. Most importantly, the process contributed

**be firmly established and enforced from the onset.** A strong facilitator is a must. While it is the job of the facilitator to encourage dialogue, it is also their responsibility to reprimand and, if necessary, remove people from the meeting.

The TTC and City of Toronto staff leading the transit improvement study knew this project was a core part of moving people in Toronto, providing more effective transit access to all residents, and implementing the City's new Official Plan. In spite of strong and divided opinion, they had the resolve to see this project through to completion, and were firmly supported by City of Toronto councillors.

to progressive human services policies in Peel's Official Plan, ideas for municipal cost saving through supportive land-use planning and design, and a continued high quality of life for local residents.

The amendment to Peel Regional Official Plan Human Services Planning policies was adopted by Regional Council as ROPA 11 on Sept. 9, 2004, and came into effect on Oct. 12, 2004.

**HARDY  
STEVENSON  
AND ASSOCIATES**

## About The Company

Hardy Stevenson and Associates was formed in 1990. The firm specializes in:

- ♦ Social Impact Assessment
- ♦ Environmental Planning
- ♦ Land Use Planning
- ♦ Public Consultation
- ♦ Facilitation / Mediation
- ♦ Management Consulting
- ♦ Communications
- ♦ Engineering Services

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