



CivicAction’s Greening Greater Toronto initiative has been working since 2008 to identify and take advantage of the highest potential opportunities to improve the region’s environment. With significant progress made towards driving down commercial building energy use, greening procurement and generating corporate investments in community emission reductions projects across Canada, Greening Greater Toronto has identified current challenges and new opportunities to move forward on.

Challenges

The Greater Toronto region is in better environmental shape now than it has been in recent years but, according to The Living City Report Card released by Greening Greater Toronto and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority in January 2011, we need to make substantial improvements to sustain our economic, social and environmental health.⁴⁴

We’re breathing cleaner air, using less water and diverting more waste from our homes, but we’re struggling to manage stormwater and commercial waste, control sprawl and traffic congestion, and protect our forests and wetlands (Figure 1).

As our region’s economy recovers and our population continues to grow, we need to build and sustain our region differently. We need to identify and seize the opportunities available through our growth while protecting the health of residents and ensuring that the region remains a flourishing place to live, work and invest in the long term.

Through months of research and consultation with Greening Greater Toronto’s Task Force and dozens of

experts, Greening Greater Toronto identified four areas that, although challenging, have great potential to improve the region’s environmental health: commercial waste, energy, water and biodiversity. Transportation is also a key area and is addressed in a separate chapter of this report.

Commercial Waste: Where there is waste, there is inefficiency and unrealized potential in the value of discarded goods and materials. The commercial sector generates more than 60% of the waste going to our region’s landfills, but there is little data about its composition and sources. While some large landlords have made significant progress in better managing their buildings’ waste,

Figure 1: The Living City Report Card

	Indicator	Progress	Current condition vs. target
Air Quality	SO ₂	↑ Much better	C – moderate action required
	VOC ¹	↗ Better	D – major action required
	PM _{2.5} ²	↗ Better	C – moderate action required
	NO _x	↗ Better	D – major action required
Carbon	CO ₂	↗ Better	D – major action required
Waste	Residential diversion	↗ Better	C – moderate action required
	IC&I ³ diversion	↔ No change	D – major action required
Water	Quality	↔ No change	C – moderate action is required
	Quantity	↗ Better	C – flood management F – Stormwater management
	Consumption	↗ Better	C – moderate action required
Land Use	Food security	N/A ⁴	B – minor action required
	Agriculture	↘ Worse	C – moderate action required
	Urban forest	N/A ⁴	C – moderate action required
	Green buildings	N/A ⁴	N/A ⁵
	Greenspace	↗ Better	C – moderate action required
Biodiversity	Intensification	↗ Better	B – minor action required
	Fish	↔ No change	C – moderate action required
	Terrestrial plants & animals	↘ Worse	C – moderate action required
	Natural Cover	↘ Worse	B – moderate action required

1. Volatile Organic Compounds 2. Particulate Matter 3. Industrial, commercial & institutional 4. Not reported on previously 5. Grading criteria being developed

Source: Greening Greater Toronto and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, 2011, with in-kind support from The Boston Consulting Group, http://www.thelivingcity.org/lcrr/LivingCityReportCard_web_r1.pdf

landlords do not have direct financial incentives to do so, as the costs are passed on to their tenants within general operating costs. Tenants do not have a clear sense of the amount of waste they're generating, the costs they are incurring and the best practices for reduction and diversion available. The region also lacks the capacity to process some commercial waste – particularly organic waste – that could be diverted.

Energy: Reducing demand for energy is critical in order to improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions. There has been more awareness and action on energy efficiency and conservation in recent years, but the lack of consistent data on energy use and energy measurement standards makes it difficult for people and organizations to understand and address their energy use. Many conservation efforts focus on decreasing electricity use, which reduces our need for coal-fired power, but we need to expand our attention to include natural gas, a large source of carbon emissions in the Greater Toronto region.

Water: Living on the edge of Lake Ontario, we often take water quantity and quality for granted. Canada's per capita water use is among the highest in the world,⁴⁵ and staggering amounts of infrastructure investment and energy are needed to treat and distribute the region's water. A less understood, but in many ways more urgent, water issue is stormwater and flood risk management. Stormwater run-off is the single greatest factor affecting water quality and the health of our rivers, but stormwater controls exist in only 23% of the region's urban areas.⁴⁶

Biodiversity: The region's natural ecosystem, which provides many benefits, is under threat, with 63% of plant and animal species at risk. Increasing the quality and quantity of the natural vegetation cover that sustains the distribution and population of our plants and animals is a major challenge. Corporations own a significant portion of land in the region and much of it is vacant, paved over or covered with manicured lawns that discourage natural habitat.

Strengths

The Summit endorsed the overarching belief held by Greening Greater Toronto's community of leaders that our region is perfectly positioned to flourish through environmental action and innovation and that such measures will contribute to our social and economic prosperity. Investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy and green technologies can be leveraged to spur economic development by funding early innovation, incorporating training

"If you're an organization and you create garbage, it's inefficiency... you're buying things twice. Everyone wants to get rid of inefficiency and (the Town of Markham's zero waste policy) is one way to do it."

- Claudia Marsales, Town of Markham

opportunities for young people and members of marginalized communities and purchasing from local suppliers. Mega projects are powerful, but so are smaller projects that can be aggressively expanded and repeated, proving (and improving on) new technologies or approaches (see also the Economy chapter on pages 13-15 of this report).

The Summit supported the move to create more and better bridges between governments, businesses and communities that can be used to leverage the leadership and resources of businesses, the wisdom and ingenuity of communities and the investment and planning priorities of governments. Greening Greater Toronto's Greening Canada Fund, managed by Green Power Action, is one example of the virtuous circle that can be created by connecting private capital to community sustainability projects to produce long-term efficiency gains and cost savings.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

1. Develop a regional strategy to reduce and divert commercial waste.

An effective regional strategy needs to be informed by and responsive to

the interests of organizations at each stage of the waste chain, including product manufacturers, commercial waste generators, waste haulers, companies that can use waste for other business opportunities, and our municipal and provincial governments. The strategy should incorporate such tools as awareness and education, internal procurement policies to reduce packaging, accountability (manufacturer life cycle responsibility), allocation of costs (through green leases and waste metering), waste processing capacity and public policies (for example, requiring reporting of waste or eliminating subsidies for waste dumping).

2. Expand energy conservation programs to address electricity and gas use, and explore the opportunities for district heating.

Greater efforts are needed to develop and implement a standardized way to measure and monitor energy use by offices, industrial operations and other institutions, and to use this energy data to articulate and promote the business case for energy efficiency. Greening Greater Toronto is working with office building landlords and tenants to measure and reduce their electricity and gas use through its Race to Reduce challenge. Residents also need to better understand how they can influence their households' energy use (and costs) and be provided with incentives to reduce their gas and other energy consumption.

The Summit also considered ways to increase use of alternative heating technologies. The City of Toronto, for example, will allow its properties to be used for geothermal energy installations. District heating, common in many European cities, was also discussed, and its proponents were encouraged to share data demonstrating its benefits over conventional generation and distribution.

3. Reduce water consumption and improve stormwater and flood risk management by making the environmental and financial case for water consumers and municipalities.

Water consumption has dropped nine percent in recent years.⁴⁷ Further reductions may be achieved by expanding public awareness of its

environmental and financial costs by measuring water consumption and alerting residents and organizations to the amounts of water they consume and the effects of their high consumption. This can be helped through: redesigned water bills; installing smart water meters; pricing water at its true cost, particularly for industrial consumers; using more stormwater to offset drinking water use for non-drinking water purposes; and seeding ideas to reduce water use in the school curriculum to help drive inter-generational change.

To improve our water quality and quantity, municipalities need to initiate and continue planning and investment in stormwater infrastructure development and flood risk management, including providing residents with incentives to reduce the water they send into sewers through downspouts and driveway runoff and to install back flow valves on properties at risk of basement flooding.

4. Launch a multi-sectoral effort to green corporate and vacant lands.

A leadership group of conservation authorities, Ontario Power Generation (a biodiversity leader), the Canadian Business and Biodiversity Council and Wildlife Habitat Council, developers and other corporate landowners should be convened to explore opportunities to increase natural vegetation cover on corporate green spaces and vacant lands.

This effort could create an inventory of existing programs that improve biodiversity and identify the full range of benefits that greening additional lands will generate, including stormwater management and conserving drinking water and energy use. The group could also recommend appropriate funding and incentive mechanisms to encourage investments in naturalizing green spaces (financial incentives, tax credits or carbon offset credits, for example) and changes to municipal bylaws that may inhibit naturalization efforts.

See the related backgrounder, *Flourish Through Environmental Action and Innovation*, prepared for the Greater Toronto Summit 2011 at: www.civicaaction.ca/publications

