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Subject: [GA List] the future is here
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Finally, a project that few knew was in the works, has come out of the shadows with the launching of its web site, http://choosingourfuture.ca/index_en.html . Almost nothing has been made public about this project until now.

The seed was planted at a meeting of the so-called Tripartite Committee (NCC chair + Ottawa & Gatineau Mayors) back in October 2005. (Before that, the web site says, there was a "major conference on community sustainability" in November 2004. Does anyone know what this might refer to?)

From its home page:

"Choosing our Future is an innovative joint planning initiative of the City of Ottawa, the City of Gatineau, and the National Capital Commission. The goal of this multi-year project is to help Canada's Capital Region face the challenges of the 21st century, and integrate concepts of sustainability and resiliency into all facets of regional planning and design. It is a community-wide exploration that re-evaluates our institutional structures, mind sets, and policies.

In the foreseeable future, the National Capital Region can expect to encounter a number of changes - some of which will present opportunities and others challenges - including climate change, a shifting global economy, resource scarcities and price fluctuations, new population dynamics, alternative energy systems, and new technologies.

...

The time frame addressed by this project will include a 100 year long term vision and strategic directions for the next 30 years that will include targeted goals and sustainability and resiliency indicators. ..."

There are six background pages (most are extremely short), on sustainability, resiliency, why do long-term planning, etc. The only background pages with a bit more substance are about a long list of current challenges (slow-moving and sudden shocks) and examples of other Canadian cities (Calgary, Whistler).

(This is a very short list of other cities. Other interesting work of this kind that I am aware of is going on in Hamilton, Winnipeg, Vancouver, the Atlantic Region and, outside Canada, in Seattle and Guadalajara. I'm sure there are many more.)

More background is attached to the Challenges page (also found under "Past Activities and achievements").

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targeted goals and sustainability and resiliency indicators."

To help pay for this project, the City of Ottawa received a \$350,000 grant from the federal Green Municipal Fund, which is administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). The City of Gatineau and the NCC have each kicked in \$100,000, and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation are also contributing \$75,000 and \$35,000 respectively.

Five Resource Groups have been established to assist in the shaping of the Project, about 'Scope and Capacity Building', 'Communications and Engagement', 'Futures Workshop and Design Charrette Development', 'Vulnerability, Sustainability, and Resiliency Analysis' and 'Community Energy Plan Development'.

One section gives background on The Natural Step -- a well-known general framework for achieving sustainability. On another page one reads that "Sustainability consultants from The Natural Step Canada office will be working with the Choosing Our Future team to help all participants build a shared understanding of and language for sustainability."

If you kind of feel left out of all this, note that "A community partnership program will be launched in June 2009" and a "Choosing our Future symposium ... is scheduled for the end of September 2009."

The outcome of the project is expected to consist of three Plans:

"Sustainability Plan - with its long-term vision and 30-year targets and strategies, this plan will function as a strategic policy document at the highest tier, providing an overarching context and direction for government policy throughout the region.

Risk Mitigation and Prevention Plan - will build on the Sustainability Plan and will include a number of research projects, culminating in a comprehensive set of recommendations for how to increase the resiliency of the region through long-term planning, and particularly through alternative approaches to land-use and infrastructure design. The plan will work towards a community that is capable of reducing risks and recovering from potential social, epidemiological and natural hazards.

Community Energy Plan - will establish an approximate mix of strategies based upon a set of broad performance targets for security, resource availability, emissions, costs, and the carrying capacity of built infrastructure and ecological systems. Strategies will integrate alternative energy system design (the supply side), with energy efficient buildings, transportation, land-use planning and other demand side factors."

In short, there is a fair bit to chew on here, and I for one welcome this initiative. So much of what comes out of City hall (Official Plan, Zoning) is driven by developers. With any luck, this project may escape that fate. The web site has been entered as the 109th Link on the Links section of the Greenspace Alliance web site, <http://www.greenspace-alliance.ca/links> .

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