

Discovery Workshop Report **North Simcoe, Orillia, Muskoka** *November 2, 2009*

INTRODUCTION

This report is part of The Rural Research Priorities through Community Engagement (RRP) Project, a one-year endeavor to identify and prioritize development needs in Rural Ontario. The report is a summary of information collected at a 3-hour workshop in Orillia, ON. 22 community leaders and business people from North Simcoe, Orillia, and Muskoka gave feedback on their community's development needs and research questions. This information, along with similar information gathered in seven other communities in Southwestern Ontario, will guide the research pursued over the course of the RRP project.

The workshop was hosted by, Donna Hewitt, General Manager, Orillia Area Community Development Corporation, in partnership with Muskoka Futures, and North Simcoe Community Futures Development Corporation. Dr. Wayne Caldwell, Professor, University of Guelph; Ms. Suzanne Ainley, Project Coordinator, The Ontario Rural Council (TORC); and Mr. Jeff Dixon, Project Coordinator, The Monieson Centre, introduced the RRP project and Mr. Erik Lockhart, Associate Facilitator, Queen's Executive Decision Centre, facilitated the workshop. Special thanks belong to Dr. Jennifer Ball, University of Guelph; Mr. Harold Flaming, Executive Director, TORC; and Dr. Yolande Chan, Director, The Monieson Centre, Queen's School of Business for their support of the event. The RRP project is funded by the Province of Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.



QUESTION 1

What are the challenges and needs with respect to rural community and economic development and making the North Simcoe, Orillia, and Muskoka a vital community (economic, social, health)?

Top Issues:

1. **Affordable housing.** We need a workable model for affordable housing and living
2. **Loss of industry.** The manufacturing sector is shrinking and is being replaced with lower paying service/tourism jobs.
3. **Farm losses.** Our farms and associated infrastructure require support (e.g., abattoirs, local food networks, distribution, education, economic impact research, government, food procurement policy).
4. **Public transit & transportation.** Better public transit would help link our communities and increase accessibility for seniors.
5. **Planning cohesion.** We must coordinate regional economic development and planning
6. **Youth retention.** There has been a shift of resources to an older population.
7. **Healthcare.** Health care funding and services need to be coordinated, as well as developing health promotion and chronic disease prevention.
8. **Waste management.** We need better strategies in place regarding landfills, sewage systems, etc.
9. **Rural to Urban Shift.** There is increasing demand for urban services in a rural setting (e.g., retirement living, land development).
10. **Development of knowledge-based industries.** We must determine niches and research gaps for knowledge-based development opportunities
11. **Poverty.** We must address poverty and literacy.
12. **Broadband internet.** We need to ensure outlying areas are connected.

QUESTION 2

If you had access to researchers for a year, what would you ask them to study in relation to question 1? What are the critical research questions requiring answers and insights?

1. **Economic impact of agriculture.** What is the economic impact of agriculture to Muskoka and Simcoe County and what are models that work in rural settings for local/sustainable food systems? What can be done to re-establish and support family farms and can support for agriculture be fostered locally?
2. **Economic development models.** What type of economic development models could assist multiple communities with diverse interests and needs to achieve their individual objectives? How can we coordinate a regional economic strategy?
3. **Youth attraction and retention.** How do rural communities create vibrant communities that attract and retain youth and knowledge-based industry?
4. **Affordable housing.** How do we build more affordable housing and ensure they are occupied?
5. **Public transit.** How can we further develop public transportation services? Are there successful examples where municipalities received funding?
6. **Land-use policies.** How can rural communities develop land use policies that protect agricultural lands, forests, water ways, natural habitats etc. for food production and allow for other uses (energy) while at the same time meeting the demands for growing urbanization and industrialization?
7. **Waste management systems.** What are waste management systems that provide the safest, locally controlled, financially viable, affordable solutions to the waste management issues in Ontario?
8. **Local capital.** What are the emerging opportunities that could be developed that capitalize on existing workforce skills, infrastructure, community & natural resources etc. in our area?
9. **Post secondary education strategies.** How do we develop a strategy around post-secondary education which contributes to the attraction and retention of younger entrepreneurs?
10. **Knowledge-based industry.** What are the gaps in our existing product mix for the further development of knowledge-based industry? What are the regional assets that can be translated into economic wins?

QUESTION 3

What local resources (organizations, reports, past work etc.) might contribute to addressing the issues identified above? What local businesses have had success overcoming related challenges and can be consulted or studied?

1. **Economic impact of agriculture.** What is the economic impact of agriculture to Muskoka and Simcoe County and what are models that work in rural settings for local/sustainable food systems? What can be done to re-establish and support family farms and can support for agriculture be fostered locally?
 - Savour Muskoka (James Murphy)
 - Province of Quebec models for local food systems
 - GTA Ag Action Committee and associated research
 - Local Food Plus
 - Simcoe County study - 15 to 20 years ago
 - Simcoe County Health Unit - poverty study - nutrition task force
 - Muskoka Economic Strategy - Phase 1 (available at www.muskoka.on.ca) has some statistics on this topic
 - Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FNOM)

2. **Economic development models.** What type of economic development models could assist multiple communities with diverse interest and needs to achieve their individual objectives? How can we coordinate a regional economic strategy?
 - Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA) - Sustainability Plan
 - Muskoka Economic Strategy (available at www.muskoka.on.ca) This strategy looked at regional economic development models - this may be helpful, but it is only an initial assessment of the role of the District of Muskoka in economic development
 - Local strategic plans (to assist in background research and goals and objectives)
 - Greater Peterborough Economic Development Corporation model (Jay Amer)
 - District of Muskoka
 - Readcap - Rama and Ramara Rural Economic Development Study- 2008
 - Region of Durham - economic development office
 - City of Orillia Economic Development Strategy Spring 2009
 - City of Barrie Strategy Fall 2009
 - Eastern Ontario Economic Alliance
 - South Western Ontario Economic Development Alliance {#148}

3. **Youth attraction and retention.** How do rural communities create vibrant communities that attract and retain youth and knowledge-based industry?
 - Focus group research involving local youth (i.e. a number of survey questions asked to 15-18 year olds in the area)
 - Lakehead University, Georgian College, and Laurentian University to participate in discussion, share studies
 - Local Youth Centres

4. **Affordable housing.** How do we build more affordable housing and ensure they are occupied?
 - Solterra - Bracebridge affordable housing project (Shelley Raymond)
 - Habitat for Humanity
 - County of Simcoe - Housing Staff
 - Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness
 - North Simcoe Chapter of the Alliance to End Homelessness
 - Municipal councils throughout the region
 - District Social Services Administration Boards
 - Options for Homes - Orillia CFDC (Gloria Tozek)
 - Children Youth & Family Coalition for Simcoe County- has a basic needs table addressing housing as a specific issue
 - Local Health Integration Network- locally and in other regions for comparisons
 - O'Brien House - Oro Medonte
 - Local Housing and Resource Centres
 - Housing Help Association of Ontario

5. **Public transit.** How can we further develop public transportation services? Are there successful examples where municipalities received funding?
 - Simcoe County – 2008 community consultation study and transportation study
 - North Simcoe CFDC's transportation model coming from the "Picture This" strategic plan.
 - North Simcoe Communities Future Development Corporation - Business Retention and Expansion Study 2009
 - Town of Huntsville, municipal bus service
 - Consider European models - higher density communities/rural access

6. **Land-use policies.** How can rural communities develop land use policies that protect agricultural lands, forests, water ways, natural habitats etc. for food production and allow for other uses (energy) while at the same time meeting the demands for growing urbanization and industrialization?
 - Muskoka Watershed Council (Ian Turnbull)
 - Georgian Bay Land Trust
 - Emerging North Simcoe Land Trust
 - Lake Simcoe Protection Act
 - Intergovernmental Action Plan for Simcoe County
 - Simcoe Huronia Association for Renewable Energy (<http://sites.google.com/site/sharehuron/>)
 - Canadian Wildlife Service - Habitat Management
 - Muskoka Heritage Foundation (Dan Brooks, Ken Black)
 - Severn Sound Environmental Association- Sustainability Plan
 - Ontario Land Trust Alliance
 - Parry Sound District Municipal Association
 - Sewell Report – 1990
 - City of Edmonton

- Provincial Policy Statement, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy - policy planning direction from Province to be implemented in local planning documents
7. **Waste management systems.** What are waste management systems that provide the safest, locally controlled, financially viable, affordable solutions to the waste management issues in Ontario?
- Simcoe County completed a Waste Management Master Plan - many years ago
 - Simcoe County last week commissioned a new waste management study (Robert Lamb)
 - Ducks Unlimited
8. **Post secondary education strategies.** How do we develop a strategy around post-secondary education which contributes to the attraction and retention of younger entrepreneurs?
- Education Huntsville, www.educationhuntsville.ca
 - Lakehead Orillia Business plan

QUESTION 4

To ensure that today's workshop results in lasting community benefits, what actions can your community take to address these priorities and what assistance do you need?

Suggested Next Steps (in no particular order)

1. Get these issues on municipal council agendas.
2. Connect small towns with education institutions to explore these research issues and to do some focused research (e.g. Collingwood and Blue Mountain - affordable housing study).
3. Create a "matching system": an inventory of post-secondary institutions/departments with research expertise areas with the community needs. This may include matching students with needs.
4. Create an affordable housing committee (note: Nov. 2010 elections and committee formation). Address funding mechanisms (e.g. tax / trip etc.).
5. Municipal best practices across Ontario / Canada on specific topics (ex: economic development, waste management etc.) - need to identify ways to profile these best practices.
6. Share results with local organizations and challenge them on what role they can play. Ex: Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture, Land Owners Associations, Farm Fresh, District Muskoka.
7. Research analyst program. Robert Wong at Georgian College. Suzanne at TORC
8. Pilot Program at Muskoka Arts Council. Creative Intelligence in creative economy.
9. Need to identify the key stakeholders not here today that have vested interest regarding today's findings.
10. CFDCs should host Town Hall to develop community/regional action plan.
11. CRINK - creative innovative knowledge based economy... communities must find their own niche (brand, unique selling proposition) to generate opportunities - Gord Hume (London)
12. Ensure ongoing education & awareness regarding community impacts on economy, youth retention, food supply within the agricultural sector.
13. Increase awareness and education through local TV.

Appendix A – Rough Ideas for Question 1

What are the challenges and needs with respect to rural community and economic development and making the North Simcoe, Orillia, and Muskoka region a vital community (economic, social, health)?

Voting Results

Multiple Selection (maximum choices = 6) (Allow bypass)

Number of ballot items: 23

Total number of voters (N): 21

Rank	Issue	Comments	Total Votes
1	Affordable housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable housing ...Affordable living 	11
1	Loss of industrial jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shrinking manufacturing/higher paying jobs being replaced with lower paying service/tourism jobs As average wages drop, greater demand for affordable housing, shared transportation etc. 	11
1	Farm losses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability of agriculture and the local infrastructure required to support it - abbatoirs, local food networks, distribution, education, economic impact research, municipal, provincial, federal, food procurement policy, ...consolidation of farms (i.e. loss of the family farm) ...promote local food supply in support of regional farmers 	11
4	Public transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public transportation services - linking communities, centralize services, senior's access 	9
4	Regional planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination of regional economic development and planning 	9
6	Youth Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outmigration/retention of youth ... Youth outmigration resulting in an aging population (both local residents and immigrating retirees) - shifting the focus and resources to an older population 	8
7	Health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health care funding/services/coordination ... health promotion and chronic disease prevention 	7
7	Waste Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste management ... land fill... septage strategies 	7
9	Rural to urban shift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural to urban shift - effect on community leadership, impact on budgets and demands to provide urban services in rural settings (e.g. retirement living, demand for developing rural landscape with uncertain land use parameters etc) 	6
10	Knowledge-based development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine niches and research gaps for knowledge-based development opportunities 	5
10	Poverty and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural poverty and literacy issues 	5

	literacy		
10	Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High speed internet access 	5
13	Season employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonality of employment opportunities ...Muskoka faces seasonality challenges which negatively impact business retention and attraction 	4
13	School Closures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School closings and impact long term 	4
13	Training resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local workforce training resources (e.g. trades training has to go elsewhere) 	4
13	Local Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote local food supply in support of regional farmers 	4
17	Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water as a public right - publicly administered, safe 	3
17	Venture Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to venture capital ...Awareness/Lack of 	3
19	Immigration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making rural communities attractive for new immigrants 	2
19	Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation facilities - lack of / access to 	2
21	Proximity to GTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcoming perception that this region is too far north of the GTA to locate a competitive profitable business in 	1
21	Property Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property rights (Governments treating some lands as their own without collaboration with land owners) 	1

Appendix B – Rough Ideas for Question 2

If you had access to researchers for a year, what would you ask them to study in relation to question 1? What are the critical research questions requiring answers and insights?

Note: prior to voting, the group brainstormed questions. Below is the result of selecting top questions

Voting Results

Multiple Selection (maximum choices = 6) (Allow bypass)

Number of ballot items: 17

Total number of voters (N): 22

Rank	Issue	Questions	Total Votes
1	Economic impact of agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the economic impact of agriculture (food, fuel, fibre) both primary and secondary impacts, to the region - Muskoka and Simcoe County • Population studies-what has been done in other communities/countries that has successfully addressed sustainability of agriculture? • What are models that work in rural settings for local/sustainable food systems (production to consumption) • What can be done to re-establish/support family farms? How can support for agriculture be fostered locally? • What models exist for reducing 'red tape' associated with farming and housing development? (e.g., sustainability of agriculture) 	16
1	Economic development models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of economic development model could assist multiple communities with diverse interest and needs to achieve their individual objectives? ...How to coordinate a regional economic strategy? 	16
3	Youth retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do rural communities create vibrant communities that attract/retain youth and knowledge-based industry? ... • What can we do to attract new youth to our area and how do we encourage youth to stay or return to our communities? 	13
4	Affordable housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you make affordable housing affordable? issues related to building & then occupying ... Identify innovative ways to address affordable living in rural Ontario which recognizes the changing social landscape (age, needs, resources and sustainability). 	12
5	Public transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we further develop public transportation 	10

		<p>services -- funding? -- are there other successful examples?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are examples of sustainable transportation models that can function within our rural townships to meet the needs of seniors, students, low income, families etc., and do these transportation models address access to service (i.e. medical etc.)/jobs issues? 	
5	Land-use policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can rural communities develop; land use policies that further protect agricultural lands, forests, water ways, natural habitats etc. for food production, allow for other uses (energy) and meet the demands for growing urbanization and industrialization 	10
7	Waste management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are waste management systems that provide the safest/locally controlled/financially viable/affordable/solutions to the waste management issues in Ontario. • Develop a waste management master plan which looks at best practices world wide and provides a recommendation for Simcoe County. 	9
7	Local capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the emerging opportunities that could be developed that capitalize on existing workforce skills, infrastructure, community & natural resources etc. in our area? 	9
9	Post-secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we develop a strategy around post-secondary education (Georgian College, Lakehead University and Nipissing University in Bracebridge) to develop a retention and attraction strategy for younger entrepreneurs 	8
10	Knowledge-based industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the gaps in our existing product mix for the further development of knowledge-based industry? what are the regional assets that can be translated into economic wins? 	6
11	Commuter travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive study into commuter travel to identify if there exists any employment attraction opportunities i.e. what types of jobs are people travelling out of our region to work at? other modes of transportation (e.g. municipal airports) 	4
11	Home industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can we do to encourage more home industries, what are the barriers, money, planning policy, technology assistance ... What are some best practices/lessons learned in Transition from old industry to Knowledge based economy 	4

11	Business opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can rural areas be marketed to urban entrepreneurs as a viable business venue when services and consumer potential are limited (ex. fewer wealthy consumers, less accessibility to daycare centres, play centres, pet-care facilities?) • What can we do to attract business/manufacturing/professionals to our area? 	4
14	Centralizing schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the long-term impacts of centralizing schools? 	3
15	Amalgamations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What benefits would there be for combining the separated cities (Barrie and Orillia) into the County structure considering the overlap in health, social services, transportation, arts/culture 	2
16	Transition to knowledge-based economies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition from old industry to Knowledge based economy 	0

Appendix C – Session Overview

The **purpose** of the workshop was to engage community leaders and academics to collaborate in order to:

- Identify Southwestern Ontario knowledge needs and resources
- Prioritize research needs and opportunities
- Share experience and knowledge
- Build lasting relationships and communication channels
- Serve Southwestern Ontario

Discovery workshop groups **explore four topics**:

1. Burning issues. What are the challenges and needs with respect to rural community and economic development and making the North Simcoe, Orillia, and Muskoka region a vital community (economic, social, health)?
2. Research wish list. If you had access to researches for a year, what would you ask them to study? Given the immensity of the research “wish list” and the scarcity of available resources, what are your research priorities?
3. Local capacity. What local resources (organizations, reports, past work etc.) might contribute to addressing the issues identified above? What local businesses have had success overcoming related challenges and can be consulted or studied?
4. Ensuring success. To ensure that today’s workshop results in lasting community benefits, what actions can your community take to address these priorities and what assistance do you need?

Appendix D – Methodology

Information Gathering and Community Consultation process

The community consultation process included an information gathering component composed of a series of interactive workshops using facilitators from the Queen’s Executive Decision Centre. The purpose of this component was to get input from a broad cross section of community stakeholders.

The consultation was conducted using a group decision support system also known as an electronic meeting system (EMS), an innovative facilitation process developed from research at the Queen’s School of Business. The Queen’s EMS, called “the Decision Centre”, combines expert facilitation with a state of the art group decision support system to enable groups to rapidly accelerate idea generation and consensus building. This facility consists of a network of laptops accessing software designed to support idea generation, idea consolidation, idea evaluation and planning. The tool supports, but does not replace, verbal interaction; typically 25% of interaction takes place on the computers. Feedback from groups who have used the Executive Decision Centre process includes: meeting times can be cut in half; participation goes way up; better idea generation and alternative evaluation; a more structured process; and automatic documentation of deliberations.

Over 500 organizations around North America use the Centre for meetings such as: strategic planning, visioning, annual planning, focus groups, team building, budgeting, program review, project planning, risk assessment, job profiling, 360 degree feedback, alternative evaluation, new product development and a variety of other meeting types.

In the consultations, participants were asked, for example, “*What are the challenges and needs with respect to rural community and economic development and making your region a vital community (economic, social, health)?*” Participants typed in ideas on the laptops all of which appeared on a public screen at the front of the room. These ideas were then discussed and categorized into common themes. The group was then asked “if we could only address five of these in the next year, which ones are most critical?” Individuals selected his/her top 6-7 and the overall results were then displayed to the group and further discussed.