

Stronger Together!

Supporting
community
-based
collaboration
for
sustainability
with
Sustainable
Peterborough

Stronger Together! Supporting community-based collaboration for sustainability with Sustainable Peterborough

Key Points

- Sustainable Peterborough (SP) is a community-based collaborative network of various partners and organizations from across the City, County Townships and First Nations in the region.
- In 2012, SP released the *Sustainable Peterborough Plan* (SPP), which covered several themes such as Agriculture and Local Food, Healthy Communities, Cultural Assets, and Economic Development and Employment. The plan outlined a vision of becoming “caring communities balancing prosperity, well-being and nature.”
- Collaborative action around the SPP has been laudable. Recommendations to support and strengthen on-going collaboration among organizations engaged in the current strategic plan (2021–2031) include:
 - Maintain a politically neutral home for Sustainable Peterborough.
 - Keep the objectives of the Coordinating Committee broadly focused.
 - Make a clear link between community-identified needs and committee objectives.
 - Provide committee members with opportunities to work on initiatives with impactful outcomes.
 - Provide time and opportunities during committee meetings for members to network and share information.
 - Publicly recognize contributions to sustainability efforts of member organizations.
 - Ensure that the leadership of the Coordinating Committee is passionate and knowledgeable about using collaboration to address sustainability.
 - Identify sustainability champions and people in positions of authority to join Sustainable Peterborough.
 - Foster collaboration among organizations by having Committee leaders: use a collaborative approach in meetings (e.g., charrette/consensus-based process), create a safe environment for members to speak freely and explore ideas, consult with members individually to identify common values, and provide general direction for the committee while listening to and considering members’ opinions.

Why are partnerships across organizations needed to achieve a sustainable future?

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations provide a blueprint for peace and prosperity for the planet and its inhabitants now and in the future to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹ Achieving these laudable goals, such as building sustainable cities, reducing inequalities, and creating environments that promote the health of people and nature, requires addressing a wide range of factors, such as education, income and income inequality, early childhood development, and physical environments. Improving ecosystem health will require action on a number of factors, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving waste disposal systems. Given this complexity, sustainable development cannot be fostered by a single intervention or organization; rather, collaboration and action across multiple governmental and non-governmental organizations is needed.

Longstanding community partnerships for Sustainability in Peterborough

There is a long history of visioning and action on sustainability in the Peterborough region by a range of individuals and organizations stretching back to the late 1980s. By 2000, the Peterborough Sustainability Network formed in 2000 as a community-based partnership focused on exploring policy solutions; and by 2012, the Network had evolved into Sustainable Peterborough (SP), still community-based but now receiving backbone support from Peterborough & the Kawarthas Economic Development (PKED),^{2,3} a not-for-profit organization that serves as the lead economic development agency for the City of Peterborough and the County of Peterborough. SP also evolved to encompass a wider network of partners, including numerous organizations from across

Abbreviations:

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|------|---|
| SP | : Sustainable Peterborough |
| SPP | : Sustainable Peterborough Plan |
| PKED | : Peterborough & the Kawarthas Economic Development |

the City, County Townships and First Nations of the region, including from the business community, non-profits, public health, education institutions, and regional and local government.³

In 2012, SP released the *Sustainable Peterborough Plan* (SPP), which covered several themes such as Agriculture and Local Food, Healthy Communities, Cultural Assets, and Economic Development and Employment.⁴ The plan outlined a vision of becoming “caring communities balancing prosperity, well-being and nature.”⁴ The plan has had significant impacts in the region, including being incorporated into Official Plans in the region, and influencing an age-friendly strategy in the City of Peterborough, as well as planning in a range of sectors, including transportation, energy, culture, and community well-being.³ A Steering Committee comprised of key sectors was established to implement the SPP.⁵ At that time, committee meetings were held bi-monthly and included committee members and working groups who provided updates and highlighted completed or in progress work. The current *Strategic Plan 2021-2031* makes several changes to the structure of SP (e.g., less frequent meetings and the elimination of working groups); is focused on guiding collaborative action on sustainability in a convergence with PKED’s Future Ready Regional Economic Development Strategy; and is being led by a Coordinating Committee.

What is an Official Plan?

A document put forward by your municipal council or planning board describing policies on how the land in your municipality should be used to meet the needs of the community.⁵

Strengthening Collaboration for the Sustainable Peterborough Plan

14 members of the previous Steering Committee for the SPP were interviewed by the **HARMONICS** research team between November 2019 and January 2020, before the current strategic plan was released. The goal of the research was to understand how organizations across the region became engaged and remained active in collaborative work on the SPP. The recommendations below are based on the research findings. While the context of SP has changed with a new strategic plan and governance structure, reflecting on how implementation of the SPP was supported prior to the pandemic can inform how the current Coordinating Committee can support on-going collaboration among organizations engaged in the current strategic plan. Recommendations and findings fall into three main themes: 1) optimizing the structure of Sustainable Peterborough, 2) ways to deepen collaboration among members, 3) recruiting champions and optimizing the leadership role.

Quotations:

All passages in quotation marks are direct quotes from interviewed committee members.

1. Optimizing the structure of Sustainable Peterborough

Recommendation: Maintain a politically neutral home for Sustainable Peterborough to empower committee members from all communities.

In 2012, SP became housed under the non-profit organization, Peterborough & the Kawartha Economic Development (PKED). This structure helped position SP as politically neutral and allowed the committee to apply for funding from local governments. Political neutrality was useful, for example, because committee members from smaller county townships did not want the agenda of SP and related projects to be driven by the needs and interests of the larger City of Peterborough.

Recommendation: Identify broadly focused objectives for the Coordinating Committee to facilitate commitment to the SPP from a range of organizations and to foster trusting relationships across organizations.

During the initial phases of the SPP when not everyone had fully committed to working with SP, the broad focus of objectives attracted the interest of a wide range of members. This enabled the committee to collectively develop a clear, shared understanding of the work in meetings, and include meaningful goals that benefited each member's organizations in some way. This helped members perceive work on the SPP as useful to their organizations, which motivated on-going attendance and engagement at meetings and active participation in working groups. Having members recognize the alignment of values with the committee also made it easier for them to clarify how their organization's resources were being used to further their own goals, which helped them receive support from their leadership to join the committee.

By coming together around a common set of objectives in the SPP, members also had an easier time seeing how the values of their organization aligned with *other* members of the committee. Over time, because there was a shared understanding of how the objectives and values of the SPP aligned with member organizations, trusting relationships between committee members emerged. In turn, committee members were more willing to let go of concerns about ownership over specific issues in the community. For example, committee members did not feel as though they were losing control over issues they had traditionally been focused on when others stepped in to do work.

"Everybody sees sustainability as an interest for them. It's like this common interest that brings people together."

"We're all working towards the same goal. We've all got the same objectives in mind. Ethically and professionally, we're operating the way we should be. And if you've got the element of trust, you know that after leaving the meeting, you've got your assignments. You're going to come back with your action items completed to the best of their ability."

Recommendation: Make a clear link between community-identified needs and the objectives for collaborative action to improve political will for action.

Since the objectives of the SPP were based on issues previously identified as important by community organizations through the City of Peterborough Climate Change Action Plan, civil servants on the committee recognized alignment between their role serving local residents and their work on SPP objectives. This made their effort on the committee more "politically palatable," i.e., it was easier to get approval from local political leaders to implement action related to the SPP.

2. Ways to deepen collaboration among members

Recommendation: Provide committee members with opportunities to work on initiatives with impactful outcomes to help them realize the value of collaboration and keep them engaged.

Providing members with opportunities to work on initiatives with impactful outcomes solidified commitment and participation in SP. These initiatives helped members realize how the SPP was contributing to their organizations' objectives, and the ways their organizations could help strengthen sustainability in Peterborough. One member who was already engaged in community sustainability initiatives before joining the committee noted that if there was not alignment with their own approach to sustainability issues, they would not have "wasted time" working with SP.

Some members saw value in using their limited time and resources to participate in the SPP because the targets of action included institutions of power (e.g., governments). They viewed such action as having a large potential impact on the community, which encouraged them to continue participating when the SPP was in its early stages. Before these initiatives, some members had difficulty determining whether they were making progress on the SPP and what the value of their effort was, which made them less willing to support the SPP.

Recommendation: Provide time and opportunities during committee meetings for members to network and share information to promote buy-in to the SPP and engagement with other members.

Steering Committee meetings provided opportunities for members to network. Regular information sharing by members at meetings led to an exciting and dynamic experience for participants that gave them access to useful knowledge. This was accentuated by the fact that Peterborough is a relatively small community, which meant that while some members were already familiar with each other, they used the committee to build new connections and relationships across organizations they might not normally interact with. Ultimately, this led to some Steering Committee members developing new partnerships and on-going collaborations with organizations representing sectors they had not previously had the opportunity to connect with.

These opportunities helped members realize how participating in the SPP could help them to achieve their own long-term goals and increased their willingness to invest their time to participate in SP.

Recommendation: Publicly recognize contributions to sustainability efforts of member organizations to encourage their on-going participation and deepen their collaboration with other partners.

Committee members annually reflected on the contributions that their organizations made to the SPP through a publicly available report card, which helped them demonstrate and take credit for their sustainability efforts. This served as a reward for organizations, and encouraged them to continue to participate in SP.

3. Recruiting champions and optimizing the leadership role

Recommendation: Identify sustainability champions and people in positions of authority to join the Coordinating Committee to attract and retain committee members.

When selecting the membership for the Steering Committee initially and overtime as vacancies arose, committee leaders aimed to invite individuals who would be identified as local champions for the work being done in different sectors. Champions included people with authority, as well as those who had a track record of work on sustainability issues. This helped to keep committee members engaged because they perceived the SPP as a serious objective and SP as a credible and potentially effective organization. Members appreciated the meaningful conversations that were had on the committee. On a related note, some committee members also highlighted the self-interest of remaining engaged in SP because it provided opportunities to connect with people who had authority and understood their priorities, which helped them achieve their own objectives.

“I think [committee members] saw that Sustainable Peterborough was helping be a focal point for change in a desired direction.”

Recommendation: Ensure that the leadership of the Coordinating Committee is passionate and knowledgeable about using collaboration to address sustainability to generate enthusiasm and spur implementation.

Having a Steering Committee leader who “knew the ins and outs of City Hall and the County,” and who put great emphasis on the work of the committee, increased members’ appreciation for the importance of the SPP and encouraged them to continue participating on the committee. One of the ways that the leader demonstrated commitment to the SPP was by dedicating more staff to support the work of the committee, which strengthened implementation in multiple ways.

Recommendation: Committee leaders can foster collaboration among organizations by: using a collaborative approach in meetings (e.g., charrette/ consensus-based process), creating a safe environment for members to speak freely and explore ideas, consulting with members individually to identify common values, and providing general direction for the committee while listening to and considering members’ opinions.

Committee leadership acted in several ways that fostered collaboration among member organizations:

- Using a collaborative approach in meetings (e.g., by using a charrette/ consensus-based process) provided opportunities for committee members to share ideas about how to improve sustainability in the Region. Through this, members were able to better understand how their organization’s objectives connected to SP and identify partnerships for addressing sustainability in a way that would serve those objectives.

- Having committee leaders who provided direction and strategy based on the concerns and priorities of members kept members engaged because it gave them more ownership and power to make changes. This consultative leadership style was maintained across changes in committee leadership.
- Fostering a safe, enjoyable environment in meetings led to everyone having the opportunity to say what they wanted without the fear of backlash. Members also saw the potential for further alignment with the SPP by exploring new ideas with other committee members, which led to greater participation and commitment.
- Consulting committee members individually helped to identify values common to local champions and enabled committee leaders to formalize a supportive and professional network of partners for sustainability efforts. This helped committee members understand how they could benefit from working on the SPP, and subsequently, they became more invested in the initiative.



"Being open to new projects and partnerships and ideas does help people to feel like they're sort of championing the implementation."



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