1. Executive Summary

On March 3, 2012, the University of Toronto Scarborough hosted the inaugural Eastern GTA Eco Summit, in collaboration with Evergreen Canada, Toronto & Region Conservation Authority and Livegreen Toronto. The aim of the Summit was to bring community members, organizations and agencies together for a one-day symposium to help kick-start the development of an environmental agenda for the region. The day consisted of a keynote address followed by breakout sessions focusing on four main areas: transportation, sustainable food, climate action and parks and conservation. An all-day environmental fair ran concurrently with the sessions. Participants were highly engaged with the brainstorming process, raising many important issues and making a series of recommendations for potential future initiatives. The Summit was a success, and among the next steps put forth is to organize a second Eastern GTA Eco Summit to capitalize on the ideas, energy and enthusiasm developed during the inaugural event.

2. Introduction

The University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) is committed to helping ensure a healthy planet for generations to come. UTSC honours this commitment by demonstrating excellence in scholarship and teaching in environmental disciplines, implementing initiatives that minimize the environmental impacts of its campus, and developing outreach programs that make the campus community more engaged with environmental issues.

UTSC understands, however, that environmental sustainability is a global issue linked to many other national and international challenges, from the socio-economic to the political, and therefore requires coordinated action far beyond campus boundaries. In collaboration with community partners, and in its role as an intellectual and cultural hub for the eastern Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the UTSC community recognized the need for an interactive forum in which to begin discussing and devising an environmental agenda for the region.
From this recognition emerged the first annual Eastern GTA Eco Summit, hosted by UTSC in partnership with Evergreen Canada, Toronto & Region Conservation Authority, and Livegreen Toronto on March 3, 2012.

The purpose of this report is to present an overview of the Summit activities, summarize the issues identified by the participants and potential initiatives that could be undertaken to address them, as well as suggest a series of next steps that will give the organizing partners an actionable statement of direction for encouraging sustainability in the eastern GTA.

3. Eastern GTA Eco Summit

3.1 VISION
To facilitate an inclusive, wide-ranging and collaborative discussion among community members, organizations and agencies as a first-step towards developing a concrete environmental agenda for the eastern GTA.

3.2 OBJECTIVES
• Bring community members, organizations and agencies from the eastern GTA together for a one-day symposium and brainstorming session at UTSC
• Facilitate discussion around four main themes: transportation, sustainable food, climate action, and parks & conservation.
• Generate enthusiasm for a shared environmental vision among participants
• Create opportunities for networking and free-form discussion

3.3 PLANNING & PARTNERS
The Eastern GTA Eco Summit was first conceived of at a Livegreen Toronto workshop held at Hart House at the University of Toronto in the fall of 2010. At that event, Livegreen Toronto announced it was looking for partners to host local summits on environmental issues.

4. Activities
On March 3rd, 2012, over 200 members of the eastern Greater Toronto Area gathered at UTSC for the inaugural Eastern GTA Eco Summit. The event was hosted in the campus’s newest building, the impressive Instructional Centre at the corner of Ellesmere Road and Military Trail.
4.1 ENVIRONMENTAL FAIR
The day began with registration and the opening of the all-day Environmental Fair, composed of approximately twenty organizations, clubs and businesses showcasing their environmental resources and initiatives. The fair provided an excellent opportunity for attendees to learn more about programming already underway in the area, and to receive information regarding upcoming environmental events in the Eastern GTA. The Eco Fair continued throughout the day’s activities, providing a valuable networking venue.

4.2 KEYNOTE
The day began with an engaging keynote presentation by UTSC Professor of Urban Geography Andre Sorensen entitled “Building the Resilient City-Region”. The address highlighted the need to create local capacity in terms of energy, food supply, and talent and innovation to deal with risks associated with environmental threats such as climate change. He emphasized relying less on long-distance supply chains, the importance of protecting soils, water and groundwater quality, all while creating stronger, local social systems that can better handle a crisis.

4.3 BREAKOUT SESSIONS
The keynote address was followed by two sets of breakout sessions, with one session for each of the following four themes: Parks & Conservation, Transportation, Sustainable Food, Climate Action. These breakout sessions were the heart of the event, as they provided an arena for community members to engage each other in a guided dialogue. Participants were asked to collectively identify key issues within each of the four themes, as well as potential solutions and next steps.

4.3.1 PARKS & CONSERVATION
Moderated by Sue Arndt of Evergreen, Natalie Swaak of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and Dave Harvey of Parks People. This breakout session aimed to identify issues and initiatives related to public parks, conservation, and (re)naturalization efforts in the eastern GTA. Moderators broke the attendees into smaller groups of five to eight people. They were asked to discuss what they felt are major issues and challenges in the eastern GTA. After fifteen minutes of discussion, each group presented their issues and concerns to the rest of the room. With such an engaged group of attendees a variety of issues were brought up.
Some issues related to connecting people to each other, to parks and to culture. Many of the groups had strong views on the lack of accessible information and hoped that a “community board” or website of some kind would be created.

One group felt there was an over-management of Rouge Park, and stated that natural trails should not be paved for walkways. They felt that people should understand the difference between conservation and preservation, and the park’s main priority should be to protect the flora and fauna while connecting people to nature, serving as a kind of neighbourhood hub.

Another issue that a few residents shared was concern around bank erosion near creeks and rivers. They pointed out that proper monitoring of storm-water flow and ground-water flow is necessary, and that wet-weather flow is not even being addressed. Other shared concerns among attendees included: the effects of invasive species (especially wild garlic mustard and dog strangling vines) on parks; the lack of education on nature, species and park conservation for people, particularly youth; garbage in and around parks; shore-line cleanup; animal habitats being destroyed; pesticide usage; and water pollution.

The aim of this breakout session was to discuss transportation issues in Scarborough and neighboring communities. It began with opening remarks from Israt and Tsering discussing transportation affordability, accessibility and connectivity as being crucial for the eastern GTA and surrounding communities. The moderators then divided participants into seven groups. Each group was asked to identify and brainstorm issues with transportation in the eastern GTA. Groups then shared their thoughts with the larger group.

A primary concern was the availability and distribution of transit. There is no shared transportation vision across the GTA, and therefore no cohesiveness between the transportation community and the public. There is a need for more responsive transit scheduling that supports more needs of more people.
Participants had concerns around TTC accessibility at night, as well. TTC buses do not run after 1am, and there is no subway running on Sundays at 8am. Bike lanes were also a topic of contention. Participants strongly urged the city to look into increasing the number of bike lanes, as bicycle power has the potential to become the main transportation method in downtown areas. There is also no cycle training available and a real lack of suitable bicycle infrastructure (bike racks).

General concerns were raised over the sheer number of cars on the roads and highways. Scarborough may have a limited geographic area, but the population is increasing very quickly, and this has led to a noticeable increase in the number of vehicles on the roads. Participants felt that transit planning needs to be better incorporated into land use planning, and that our current transportation infrastructure and bus routes reflect poor urban design.

Group members felt there was little political support for transportation improvements, and no political movements focused on optimizing the transportation system in Toronto. They also felt that the federal and provincial governments should step in to take action and provide better funding for transit.

Participants suggested the concept of sustainability should be taught in primary school, as early education on these issues is severely lacking. They also suggested that transit systems today should work hard to transition to renewable fuel resources.

Finally, participants emphasized that while there is a lack of cohesion in the transportation system itself, there is also a lack of connection in the community, citing little to no influence of carpooling networks or groups of people committed to smart commuting.

System integration and efficiency would help reduce overcrowding on certain routes and long wait-times. This would also help with the rising cost of fares, which participants felt were unreasonably high already and lead many to use their cars instead.
4.3.3 SUSTAINABLE FOOD  
Moderated by Katie Fullerton from EcoSpark and Helene St. Jacques.

This breakout session encouraged discussion and debate around food production, and outlined possible ways to promote sustainable foods and farming in and around the eastern GTA. Moderators provided an introduction to the topic of sustainable food and its history. Attendees were then broken up into smaller discussion groups. Each smaller group discussed their main issues and challenges with sustainable food along with some possible solutions.

Issues identified were vast and varied, ranging from general problems to specific challenges. They included accessibility to local foods and farmers markets, early education in conscious consumption (i.e., the consequences of meat eating), carbon footprints and use of resources, tools and information to support individuals in growing their own foods, permanent allotment garden infrastructure and community-based agricultural centers, and a reliable third-party labeling system for certification so the public can make rational and informed food choices (i.e., pesticide use, organic status).

Two big issues for people were the need for better education and for involving/employing more people throughout the stages of the food production cycle (i.e., from field to table). On the education point, a popular suggestion was for food educators to be positioned in major supermarkets so they could give advice on nutritional foods and explain sustainable food production to the buying public.

The group agreed that people need to be reconnected with the food production chain so that they can realize the value that is added at each stage - farming, processing, distribution - and not just the price at the checkout counter. This involves giving consideration to the ecological and social value of food and the food system, and not just economic value - a concept commonly referred to as the triple bottom line of sustainability.

4.3.4 CLIMATE ACTION  
Moderated by Matthew Hoffmann, Professor of Political Science at UTSC, and Tim Lang, Manager of UTSC’s Sustainability Office.

Hoffmann and Lang began the discussion with a background on climate change and politics in Canada. The aim was to discuss and brainstorm a climate action plan for the eastern GTA.

Hoffmann started the discussion with an overview of global emissions of fossil fuels (CO2 emissions) where he explained the hockey stick curve and the changes in trends. This led to a discussion of the targets and goals of the Kyoto Protocol, which Canada left in December 2011. Hoffman continued by pointing out that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has declared that we need to decrease emissions within the next 5-10 years, but instead of heeding the IPCC, our emissions continue to rise. Hoffmann believes it is vitally important to consider economic development and the transforming economic system in any discussion around climate action, going on to say that decarbonizing our economy is the key to reducing the curve of emissions.

Participants then divided into small discussion groups to brainstorm issues and concerns about climate action. Many ideas and challenges surfaced and were shared with the larger group.

Some participants suggested an increase in short-term incentives to reducing emissions, that more eco-centric education is required in schools and in the community (including green clubs and classes at school), and that awareness of green resources needs to be raised.

Group members stated emphatically that they want to see real action on climate change, and that only action will capture the imagination of the next generation, the youth who need to begin taking ownership of the issue. There was also the idea to shift the power supplies to smaller distribution centers which would increase the local employment.

The suggestion was also made that to slow climate change, we need more demonstrative and catalytic regions.
The recommendations, potential initiatives and next steps identified included:

1) creating a central repository of information where community members can connect and share ideas (such as on social media networks, in community centers and libraries)
2) assigning selected people and/or groups with the responsibility of keeping the community and the discussion that began at this Summit active
3) finding ways to maintain a strong distinction between natural parks for wildlife and parks made for humans.

5.2 TRANSPORTATION

Issues raised during this session fell into seven broad categories:

1) transportation and land use planning (including regional planning connectivity and the lack of social cohesion for integrating different transportation types)
2) service improvements (better bus scheduling, problems with overcrowding, optimization of current service)
3) fare structuring (affordability, value-for-money, long-term funding)
4) community education and involvement in transportation planning
5) the size of Scarborough (different needs for different communities)
6) inconsistent political support for transit investment
7) infrastructure challenges (too many cars on the road, connectivity issues)
The recommendations, potential initiatives and next steps identified included:

1) develop community work stations where local companies can meet in a cost-effective way, thereby reducing cars on the road
2) create a transit coordinator position for Scarborough
3) implement road tolls (congestion costs) to make people reconsider public transit
4) create car/van pooling incentives
5) educate the public about efficient transportation alternatives like car/bike share programs (UTSC’s carpoolzone.com)
6) encourage the use of smaller cars
7) create safer and easily accessible bike lanes
8) promote social cohesion around issues of transportation
9) synchronize traffic lights along major route to save fuel
10) improve the efficiency of public transit without raising fares
11) implement more distance-learning courses at UTSC (i.e., online courses, video lectures) to lower number of students commuting to campus

5.3 SUSTAINABLE FOOD

Issues raised during this session fell into three broad categories:
1) education
2) policies
3) access to sustainable food production

The recommendations, potential initiatives and next steps identified included:
1) set aside more land for growing food
2) encourage the creation of school gardens, community orchards, rooftop gardens, and seed growing/collecting/trading collectives
3) encourage the model of “Victory gardens” to increase backyard and permanent allotment gardens and sharing of produce
4) increase community education and awareness of locally sourced foods, such as through food educators at major supermarkets
5) encourage pollinator gardens and urban apiaries

Specific policy suggestions:
1) improve legislation to protect and preserve agriculture and farm land from other land use development
2) improve zoning laws, allowing people to sell their food
3) toughen pesticide restrictions
4) hold businesses responsible for non-disposable food packaging wastes
5) create progressive legislation for backyard farming, such as raising chickens
6) improve labeling of GMO products
7) toughen regulations on imported GMO foods
8) make laws to support small family farms instead of large corporate ones
9) encourage municipal leadership to support local initiatives

5.4 CLIMATE ACTION

Issues raised during this session fell into three broad categories:
1) education
2) transportation
3) renewable energy
The recommendations, potential initiatives and next steps identified included:

1) undertake innovative pilot and demonstration energy projects to explore new possibilities and educate the community (e.g., deep lake cooling, biofuel, offshore wind, etc.)
2) conduct a baseline study of regional energy use
3) promote local green businesses
4) encourage renewable community power and district energy projects
5) create incentives for demand reduction (e.g., rewards for carpooling, working from home, etc.)
6) involve local politicians
7) encourage municipal collaboration
8) implement an ongoing regional energy forum

6. Next Steps

The inaugural Eastern GTA Eco Summit proved very successful, bringing people from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests together for a full-day of discussion and engagement. Now that it is over, a number of steps must be taken to ensure the ideas and connections forged at UTSC continue to flourish and grow.

First, an online Facebook forum has been created for current and future participants to keep in touch, find out about upcoming events and continue the dialogues that began at the event. This forum can be found at: facebook.com/EasternGtaEcoForum.

Second, this event report will be circulated to the event partners for feedback.

Third, the finalized version of this event report will be circulated to all participants, local councilors and Members of Parliament.

And finally, the event partners will begin discussions around organizing a second Eastern GTA Eco Summit, to capitalize on the ideas, energy and enthusiasm developed during the inaugural event, and to take another step towards developing a concrete environmental agenda for the eastern GTA.

7. Acknowledgements

It would be an understatement to say that the Eastern GTA Eco Summit would not have been possible without the hard work of many dedicated individuals. We’d like to thank Professor Andre Sorensen for providing a captivating keynote address, and Andrew Arifuzzaman for being an eloquent master of ceremony. We’d like to thank Hélène St. Jacques, Tsering Dolma, Israt Ahmed, and Matt Hoffmann for facilitating the breakout sessions, as well as Sue Arndt, Natalie Swaak, and Katie Fullerton for sitting on the steering committee in addition to facilitating breakout sessions, as well as spreading the word, which helped drive the overwhelming turnout. Dave Harvey and Dip Habib provided invaluable input to the steering committee, as did Kim Tull, who also helped oversee the event coordination, which was masterfully planned and executed by Billi Jo Cox and Tracy Torres.

Thanks are due to Nadia Harduar and her team of student volunteers: Angela Tran, Thirumahal Kumarappa, Shajetha Sabanathan, Nicole Ho, Aiswarya Baskaran, Carren Ku, Michael Xie, Anne Alfred, Danny Tat, Maama Selyi-Applah, Rubama Nazifa, Shuang Xu, Yawen Li, and Suman Dhal. We would also like to thank the Aramark and UTSC Campus Police staff for being generous with their services the day of the event, as well as all of the vendors who showed that green business is alive and well in the Eastern GTA. Last but not least, we would like to thank Don Campbell and Andrew Westoll for helping with event communications. Without them you would not be reading these words, and no one beyond the summit’s attendees would be aware that the event even happened.