

# TRANS CANADA WEST PLANNING DISTRICT

## **DISTRICT PLAN - Charting the Course “Virden - Wallace Planning Area Smart Growth and Community Vision” Findings**

WORKSHOP # 1 – April 21, 2006

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### **1.0 PURPOSE**

#### **1.1 Background**

The following discussion provides an overview of the perspectives from Virden and Wallace on local planning issues. There were 36 participants in the first Smart Growth Workshop held April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006

This report consolidates findings from the first workshop. These findings will be used as the basis of Workshop #2. The second workshop will focus upon defining solutions and actions for consideration by the District Board as part of its efforts to develop a “smart growth strategy” for the Virden-Wallace Planning Area.

**These findings will be used as the basis for the second Workshop scheduled for June 15<sup>TH</sup> at 7 PM in Virden. The objective of the second workshop will be to identify concrete directions and actions to resolve the priority issues identified in Workshop #1 and to assess how these actions might contribute to the development of Virden and the surrounding area of Wallace into the communities they aspire to become.**

The Smart Growth Issues and Opportunities Workshop#1 was divided into two parts. In first part of the workshop, the District’s Planning Consultant reviewed the forces shaping development in Wallace and Virden. This historical overview of trends and land use characteristics provided an introduction to current circumstances and reflected upon the question “Where are we today?” The second part of the workshop involved dividing the participants into four smaller discussion groups of approximately 8 people. Each discussion group considered the background information presented and based upon their personal experience, views and perspectives on town and rural development needs were asked to consider the following statement:

***To help the District Board to determine how best to manage development within Town of Virden and the adjoining area of Wallace and to develop a vision of the***

*type of community citizens aspire toward, this workshop was structured to identify the issues and forces shaping land use and the factors influencing the quality of life within the Town's urban and Wallace's adjoining rural areas.*

*You may have heard of references in the popular media to the notion of "Smart Growth". Smart Growth means smart management of community resources. Smart Growth is fiscally prudent and environmentally, economically and socially sound. Smart Growth endeavours to coordinate government and community efforts to enhance the choices people have for housing, jobs, shopping, recreation/culture and transportation etc. The long term needs of people, business and the environment ultimately define what is Smart Growth and sustainable financially and what is not.*

The purpose of this workshop was to seek participant advice on the considerations which will be important to the creation of complementary planning strategy for the Town of Virden and surrounding area of Wallace.

## **1.2 The Process**

**Each participant was asked to consider the following inter-relationships and situations:**

"Virden and the surrounding area of Wallace are characterized by a diverse mix of land uses. Virden is the District's largest urban center with the greatest diversity of land uses, community services and population. Surrounding Virden, the RM of Wallace is the District's largest and most diverse rural economy with a strong agriculture and resource development sector and smaller rural communities (most notably Kola) which have demonstrated it is possible to attract investment, jobs and people to settle in the Planning District. At the edges of the Town of Virden and Wallace both inside the Town's boundaries and outside the Town's boundaries there is a mixture of large lot, limited serviced residential, highway commercial, industrial, agricultural and recreational land uses. For ease of reference we call the inside and outside edges of the two communities the Virden – Wallace Planning Area. The inter-relationships between Virden's urban and Wallace's rural characters are in part created by land use, available services, roadway inter-connections between each municipality, relationships with the regional trading area, and decision-making authority."

For the "Virden-Wallace Planning Area" two general questions were asked- **Firstly**, what are the important urban and rural land use issues that need to be resolved in order to establish a cooperative approach to development as seen from the perspective of each Municipality; and **Secondly**, what are the important attributes that help define or challenges which need to be resolved to enhance the quality of life in the Virden - Wallace Planning Area?

In response to the First Question on urban and rural land use issues and areas requiring a cooperative approach to guiding rural/urban development 13 issues were identified from Virden's perspective and 6 issues were identified from Wallace's perspective. In each case the participants decided to group the key issues under broader headings. From Virden's perspective land use issues were consolidated under the headings of "**Economic Growth**"; "**Land Use Planning Direction**" and "**Cooperative Approach to Zoning**". From Wallace's perspective land use issues were consolidated under the

headings “**Cooperative Municipal Development & Management**”; “**Increase Rural Fringe Development Flexibility**” and “**Zoning Guidelines for Fringe Land Uses**”.

In response to the questions on the attributes and challenges that shape quality of life or may need to be resolved to improve quality of life, the workshop participants identified 23 attributes and 20 challenges. In both cases the attributes and challenges identified displayed a number of inter-relationships. Participants thought it might assist in understanding these inter-relationships if the various attributes and challenges were organized under common themes. The workshop then identified and grouped the attributes under five headings as follows- “**Sense of Community**”, “**Public Facilities**”, “**Business Facilities**”, “**Economy**” and “**Location and Access**” . The challenges were grouped under seven headings as follows - “**Investment and Labor**”, “**Support for Local Services**”, “**Improve Competitiveness**”, “**Infrastructure**”, “**Image & Presentation**”, “**Recreation**”, “**Aging Population**” and “**Up-scale Housing**”.

Workshop participants were asked to assign values measuring the importance of each grouping of attributes and challenges identified by the Workshop. Importance was established by the cumulative value all participants assigned to those ideas they felt strongly about. Each participant was given a budget of \$100 to spend on promoting, for the workshops consideration, the ideas they believe require the greatest attention from the Planning District. Under the rules, each participant could spend no more than \$40, or no less than \$10 on any one item they decided to support. However, just as in the real world each participant found they did not have enough resources to do all things and had to make trade-offs. The resulting listing of findings represents how the workshop’s allocated their budgeted funds.

## **2.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Following, we present the workshop findings as defined by the total value assigned by workshop participants. Responses are presented in descending order of the importance for each of the questions as defined by the values assigned by all participants to each group of ideas created by participants in response to the questions posed.

### **2.1 Rural- Urban Issues**

**The key urban or rural land use issues the Plan needs to resolve to create a cooperative approach to rural/urban development in Virden and the surrounding area of Wallace are:**

**Part A) - From Virden’s Perspective the important land use issues and cooperative priorities are:**

#### **Priority 1: Economic Growth (620)**

- a) Need to aggressively attract new industry to area and recognize the opportunity to expand economy by seeking industries that support agriculture (e.g. Machinery dealership, flax plants etc).

- b) There is a need to designate appropriate lands and provide services to open up more land for industrial and residential uses.
- c) In order to attract residential/commercial/industrial expansion, we need to be able to offer quality municipal services (e.g. water/sewer/refuse pickup/street cleaning).
- d) Identify policies/incentives to attract and encourage economic development.

**Priority 2: Land Use Planning Direction (495)**

- a) Clearly define distinct areas for industrial and residential development, so they do not conflict. We have mixing of industrial and residential areas now which are a result of ad hoc planning placing industrial and residential development in close proximity.
- b) We need a more structured approach to land use planning based upon defining a clear direction for the community and the most appropriate land use for specific areas.
- c) Planning District requires more “consistency” in decisions made and need to be willing to use its authority to enforce “The Plan” to achieve agreed upon land use objectives and designate lands appropriately.
- d) Develop policy to renew business (key commercial- king 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> nelson) and residential areas in decline (i.e. smaller “older houses” redevelopment.
- e) Include in our development strategy ideas to improve utilization of natural features: creeks, valleys etc. for public use and to build an attractive community.

**Priority 3: Cooperative Approach to Zoning (335)**

- a) A progressive zoning by-law developed jointly by Wallace/Virden for residential/commercial/industrial expansion within and adjacent to the Town’s boundaries is required to attract new people and businesses.
- b) Encourage/increase development of senior housing zoning.
- c) Need for condominium zoning in town of Virden for retirees, younger workers.
- d) Identify boundary outside the town where joint decision making involving Virden and Wallace can be made for zoning and land use approvals.

## **Part B) - From “Wallace’s Perspective” the important land use issues and cooperative priorities are...”**

### **Priority 1: Cooperative Municipal Development & Management (220)**

- a) Develop an agreement between Town and Wallace which facilitates joint use of municipal infrastructure and facilities and where economical to do so provide a mechanism for Virden and Wallace to cooperate in the provision of municipal services and sharing in the tax benefits created by new development attracted to areas jointly serviced by the two communities.
- b) Encourage dialogue between the Councils of Virden and Wallace on the possible future realignment and sharing of administrative and other municipal responsibilities, as may be defined as beneficial, to improve the level and increase the efficiencies in the services provided to ratepayers.

### **Priority 2: Increase Rural Fringe Development Flexibility (210)**

- a) Provide flexibility for a more rural large lot residential lifestyle in designated areas of Wallace outside the boundaries of the town but in proximity to areas services;
- b) Suitability of areas to be defined by their proximity and availability of:
  - Infrastructure services; and
  - Locations which do not compete or conflict with other urban uses in Town or rural uses in the rural area around the Town.

### **Priority 3: Zoning Guidelines for Fringe Land Uses (70)**

- a) Identify a buffer zone around town of Virden defining a “no go zone” for intensive livestock operations to minimize the potential for land use conflicts
- b) Provide rationale and cooperatively designate appropriate lands in Wallace for expansion of residential and industrial outside Virden’s town limits.

**The next part of the Workshop addressed the concept of “Quality of Life” and asked participants to identify the attributes and challenges that impact peoples’ perception of quality of life. Participants were then asked to consider these attributes and challenges and create a current “quality of life index” for the Virden-Wallace Planning Area. The following presents the workshop’s findings on quality of life.**

## **2.2 Attributes and Challenges- Impact Upon Quality of Life**

### **Part A): The priority attributes that help shape Quality of Life in the Virден/Wallace Planning Area are:**

#### **Priority 1: Sense of Community (620)**

- a) Safe, clean and welcoming community
- b) Reflect a sense of a small community, security and small town friendly feel
- c) Safe environment - crime free  
Clean environment (Virден/Wallace)
- d) Environmental conscience citizens- clean air quality, recycling and refuse pick-up and disposal.
- e) Effort to consolidate and publicize recreational services, volunteer services
- f) Well kept Town neighbourhoods and shared sense of community pride in town.

#### **Priority 2: Public Facilities (585)**

- a) Availability of quality health care facilities and services within Town;
- b) Potential to expand services provide by Virден Airport
- c) Outstanding arts and cultural scene, protection and re-use of heritage buildings (museum, and theater, CP station);
- d) Essential services including k to 12 education facilities police, fire protection, sports facilities and cultural facilities;
- e) Social-recreational programs are economic and accessible to all.

#### **Priority 3: Business Facilities (495)**

- g) Good variety of shops and services
- h) Good visitor services and facilities including hotels, service stations, etc
- i) Good retail mix and relatively healthy business environment and mix of commercial uses in the downtown
- j) Good mix of sports and entertainment facilities

#### **Priority 4: Economy (290)**

- a) Strong job market in most sectors
- b) Strong oil economy and diversity in farming sector
- c) Attractive retirement area
- d) Good business variety in the provision of goods and services to the regional market place.

**Priority 5: Location and Access (180)**

- a) Accessibility to community and its connection to the region by major trunk highways # 1 and # 83;
- b) Natural beauty and creek setting of Town;
- c) Rail and bus services available to Virden;
- d) Oil and agriculture are the primary drivers of the economy;

**Part B): The priority challenges or needs we should address to improve Quality of Life in the Virden- Wallace Planning Area are:**

**Priority 1: Investment and Labor (490)**

- a) Create incentives to attract clean job opportunities (high tech) which in turn will expand demand for quality housing
- b) Develop a cooperative campaign to attract new industry and business investment.
- c) Aggressively grow our population through industry and employment and tourism attraction
- d) Provide training to increase our skilled/technically trained labor pool and develop a job placement strategy to expand and retain skilled and unskilled workers.

**Priority 2: Support for Local Services (490)**

- a) Quality of life in our community is dependent upon our ability to retain quality services ( including medical, educational, business, retail and service)
- b) Our role in providing progressive and expanding health services i.e. walk in clinic, obstetrics, and surgery important to retaining and attracting population

**Priority 3: Improve Competitiveness (300)**

- a) Necessary for our community to learning how to compete with larger centers
- b) Need to define specific actions to encourage and support of local business
- c) Work with and continue to enhance rural economic development
- d) Lead by creating and maintaining a positive attitude toward our ability to be a successful competitive community.

**Priority 4: Infrastructure (290)**

- a) Repair aging infrastructure, most notably is water system.
- b) Maintain, improve, expand, repair existing infrastructure (roads, bridges, sewage and water, and waste disposal)

### **Priority 5: Image/ Presentation (270)**

- a) Create a professional image for our areas' services i.e. restaurants clinic, gas station, and hotels
- b) Improve visual image of Town's highway and downtown views and accesses
- c) Develop a culture of "customer service" that people will remember as part of Virden's image
- d) Continue efforts to restore valuable heritage buildings
- e) Create a strategy of community beautification including development of walking trails along the creeks, decorative lighting and streetscapes in the downtown and King Street

### **Priority 5: Recreation (230)**

- a) Improve recreational facilities for youth and seniors

### **Priority 6: Aging Population (140)**

- a) Assess implications of a declining and aging population upon the directions the Town needs to take to help our population grow and/or stabilize.

### **Priority 7: Up-scale Housing (30)**

- a) Add more quality and prestige housing developments.

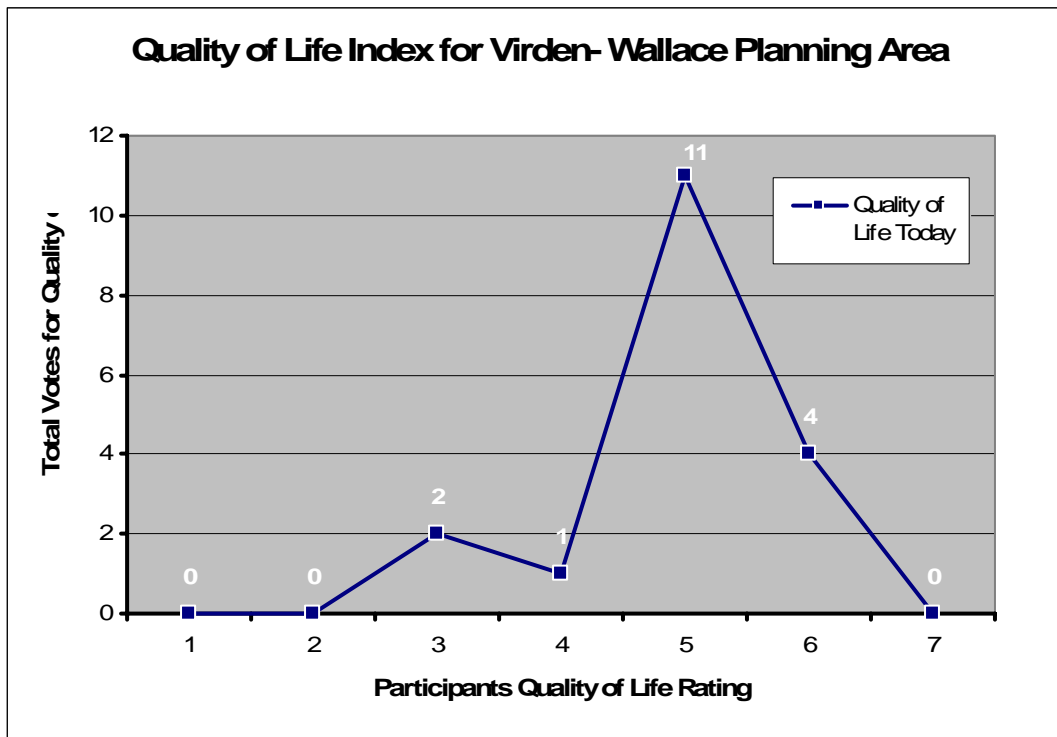
## **2.2 Quality of Life Index: Virden- Wallace Planning Area**

At the conclusion of the First Workshop on Smart Growth the participants were asked to consider the attributes and challenges and based upon their feelings rate the current state of the of the Virden-Wallace Planning Area on a "workshop quality of life index".

Quality of life is oft described by the health of a community. Improving the quality of life within our communities requires that we integrate physical development with environmental, economic and social perspectives on the needs of the community. Sustainable development, a related concept, means we endeavour to meet the needs of today without compromising the ability of future residents or generations from meeting their needs. The first step in creating a Vision for the Virden- Wallace Planning Area is to discuss were we might now sit on the "Quality of Life Index". As no such index really exists the workshop created its own in the following exercise.

Participants were asked to consider the attributes and challenges which presently define the quality of life in the community. In the absence of any formal index we created our own by using a seven step scale to understand how the workshop might rate the quality of life in the Virden-Wallace Planning Area. Each participant after considering attributes and challenges individually ranked the Planning Area on the quality of life index. Where a rating of 1 was assumed to be the worst place ever and a rating of 7 was considered the best place ever.

**Eighteen participants rated** the present quality of life and their rankings created the following graph of the Virden-Wallace Planning Area quality of live index. The index may be interpreted as follows:



**Quality of Life Index Ratings:**

- Rating of 2 or less is very negative;
- Rating of 3 is poor;
- Rating of 4 is neutral, person is non-committal to a negative or positive rating;
- Rating of 5 is good;
- Rating of 6 or higher is very positive.

Given the current mix of attributes and challenges 61 % or 11 of the 18 workshop participants' ranked the Virden-Wallace current quality of life rating as positive while 22% or 4 participants rated it very positive and 17% rated it either neutral or poor.

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