Discovery Workshop Report
County of Wellington and Region of Waterloo
October 26, 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 Elora, ON. Twenty-nine community leaders and business people from the County of Wellington and Region of Waterloo 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 Mr. Rick Whittaker, General Manager, Wellington-Waterloo Community Futures Development Corporation (WWCFDC). Dr. Wayne Caldwell, Professor, University of Guelph; Mr. Harold Flaming, Executive Director, The Ontario Rural Council; 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 Ms. Suzanne Ainley and Dr. Jennifer Ball for their coordination of the workshop and Dr. Yolande Chan, Director, The Monieson Centre, Queen's School of Business for her 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 Wellington-Waterloo region a vital community (economic, social, health)?

Top Issues:
1. **Preserving quality of life.** We need adequate and affordable housing, employment, local services, environmental quality, transportation, schools, health care, libraries etc.
2. **Skills development.** We must develop skill sets relevant to the future of the community;
3. **Youth retention.** We must ensure meaningful opportunities to attract youth back to rural communities.
4. **Business Retention and Expansion.** Attracting new & retaining existing businesses and creating knowledge based jobs.
5. **Infrastructure financing.** How do we finance municipal infrastructure demands when there is limited fiscal capacity of municipalities and inadequate provincial transfers?
6. **Public transit & transportation.** Some areas not easily accessible to major transportation corridors, bus routes are inadequate and road usage is not optimized.
7. **Local food.** We need to localize food economy to capture more wealth. For example, there are no local food processing facilities.
8. **Keeping farming viable.** We must support our agricultural businesses.
9. **Broadband Internet.** We need to ensure outlying areas are connected.
10. **Identifying and protecting cultural assets and identity.**

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. **Farming revitalization**. What can we do to revitalize our farming/agricultural sector? What strategies and opportunities are envisioned by farmers to keep their businesses viable?
2. **Community resilience**. What are the components of a resilient community? (Knowledge transfer models, attitudes and beliefs, infrastructure and supports)
3. **Local food support**. What local food processing needs and opportunities exist for local farmers and urban institutions? What potential local food distribution mechanisms could we utilize?
4. **Municipal funding support**. What models successfully fund infrastructure in small communities? In view of the present economic situation, what is the financial risk to rural communities/areas?
5. **Local strengths**. How do we turn the immense diversity (base industries) of Wellington and Waterloo County into strength? What industries and services can operate most competitively here?
6. **Market proximity**. How can Wellington County municipalities take advantage of being on the edge of the most populated area in Canada?
7. **Labour skill sets.** What is the existing skill set of commuters and the unemployed? What are the potential local economic opportunities available for the unemployed, unskilled labour pool?
8. **Public transit.** What is the impact of public transit in rural areas? Is there a benefit/cost win?
9. **Youth retention.** What are some effective youth retention strategies? From a youth perspective what would bring them to this community and what has worked in other communities?
10. **Cultural assets.** What are our cultural assets, what are they worth (intrinsically & economically), and to whom?
11. **New economy skills.** How can communities transition into the new economy and what skills are needed most?
12. **Local spending**. How do we encourage consumers to support the local economy in a society of big box stores?

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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. **Farming revitalization**. What can we do to revitalize our farming/agricultural sector? What strategies and opportunities are envisioned by farmers to keep their businesses viable?
   - Local farm businesses
   - Alfons Weersink....University of Guelph
   - Ontario Federation of Agriculture (Wellington division)
   - CFDCs
   - Alternative Land Use Systems (ALUS) in Norfolk County (Kristen Thompson)
   - Ontario Farmland Trust - Places to Grow Food Project and Planning Ontario's Working Countryside
   - Different Commodity Groups (Marketing Boards) Sheep, beef, core producers etc.
   - Seed companies may have completed research.
   - Planning for Agriculture and Food (PAFN), Jim Hiley (Googlegroups)
   - That's Al Weersink
   - Ecological Farmers Association, Karen Maitland
   - Mars
   - Guelph-Wellington Food Roundtable
   - Local Food Plus
   - Waterloo Health Unit
   - British Columbia Strengthening Agriculture Program (Food Security, new farmers, farm investments and innovation)
   - Gord Surgeoner
   - PEC Creative Rural Economies

2. **Community best practices**. What are the components of a resilient community? (Knowledge transfer models, attitudes and beliefs, infrastructure and supports)
   - Johanna Wadell's studies
   - David Douglas's Studies on CED and his reports on best practice
   - Community Futures Corporations
   - Transition Towns (Transition Guelph), Sally Ludwig
   - Guelph Partners of Innovation (Jim Whaelen)
   - Post secondary schools in the community
   - Guelph Small Business Enterprise
   - PEC Creative Rural Economies
   - Tamarack Institute for Community Development
   - Example - Business students at Wilfrid Laurier University
   - Practicum projects
   - Community Economic Development (CED) Network of Canada
   - School of Planning at University of Waterloo and Rural Planning program at University of Guelph

- The Community Resilience Manual - BC Centre for community renewal
- Tools and techniques for Community Recovery and Renewal

3. **Local food support**. What local food processing needs and opportunities exist for local farmers and urban institutions? What potential local food distribution mechanisms could we utilize?
    - OMAFRA
    - Ontario Farmland Trust - Places to Grow Food Project and Planning Ontario's Working Countryside
    - Karen Landman – University of Guelph professor has done a few studies on local food
    - Andreas Boekner, John Cranfield and Spencer Henson on local food choices and grocery distribution - FARE, University of Guelph
    - Guelph-Eramosa planning process for the flour mill
    - Peter Katona - Foodlink Waterloo Region
    - Katherine Pigott - Region of Waterloo Public Health
    - Ellen Desjardins - Waterloo Region Food System Roundtable
    - Rick Whittaker - Waterloo Wellington Community Futures Corporation
    - Planning for Agriculture and Food Network (PAFN)
    - University of Waterloo Environmental Studies research projects
    - Waterloo Region Food Flow study (Harry Cummings at University of Guelph) and Official Plan language concerning local food
    - Human Geography at Wilfrid Laurier University - local food research
    - Kathryn Cooper - project mgr for Regional Culinary Tourism Committee
    - Anita Stewart - Elora
    - American Planning Association Food Systems Planning guidelines and publication (Samina Raja, University of Buffalo)
    - OFA
    - Kate Vsetula, Wellington buy Local Buy Fresh
    - Everdale Organic Farm, Lynn Bishop

4. **Municipal funding support**. What models successfully fund infrastructure in small communities? In view of the present economic situation, what is the financial risk to rural communities/areas?
    - Local municipalities
    - Business Improvement Areas
    - Rural Ontario Municipalities Association
    - Community Grant programs in New York County
    - Association of Municipalities of Ontario
    - Public Works reports
    - Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)

5. **Local strengths**. How do we turn the immense diversity (base industries) of Wellington and Waterloo County into strength? What industries and services can operate most competitively here?
    - Municipal Economic Development & Chambers of Commerce
    - Martin Prosperity Institute

6. **Market proximity**. How can Wellington County municipalities take advantage of being on the edge of the most populated area in Canada?
   - Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee studies being done in last 3 years
   - Canada's Creative Corridor (FedNor)-Martin Prosperity Institute
   - Elbert Van Donkersgoed

7. **Labour skill sets.** What is the existing skill set of commuters and the unemployed? What are the potential local economic opportunities available for the unemployed, unskilled labour pool?
   - Wellington Waterloo Community Futures, OMAFRA - REDDI, Wellington County planning, Transportation Tomorrow Survey, Statistics Canada
   - Judi Riddolls..... Guelph Business Enterprise Centre

8. **Public transit.** What is the impact of public transit in rural areas? Is there a benefit/cost win?
   - Second Chance
   - Community Resource Centre
   - Bus to University of Guelph from Centre Wellington

9. **Youth retention.** What are some effective youth retention strategies? From a youth perspective what would bring them to this community and what has worked in other communities?
   - Ingersoll - Fusion Youth Centre - doing great things to keep youth in community
   - Junior Achievement of Guelph and Wellington - Ramona Ostrander is the Executive Director
   - Something to do! Age appropriate activities/clubs.
   - Conservation Authority youth stewardship programme.
   - Wellington Waterloo Community Futures Development Corporation (WWCFDC) new member of Ontario Youth Committee
   - Colchester County, NS rural retention successes
   - Count Me In
   - TORC

10. **Cultural assets.** What are our cultural assets, what are they worth (intrinsically & economically), and to whom?
    - Municipal Cultural Planning Partnership (ontariomcp.com)
    - Elora Centre For the Arts
    - "Heritage Centre Wellington" and other similar heritage agencies locally
    - Tourism Elora Fergus (division of Centre Wellington township)
    - Fergus Elora Bed and Breakfast Association
    - Historical walking tours in Centre Wellington
    - Wellington County Historical Society

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)
- Identify researchers, grad students, who are from specific towns to do targeted local research
- Identify exactly what has been done already in terms of addressing these research questions
- Relationship building: community organizations need to connect with educational institutions to examine the pressing issues ... Develop an email/mailing list... TORC
- Town Hall meeting.   Reps of various orgs call a gathering to review, discuss, elaborate on these issues and maybe develop task forces, action plans
- Incorporate results in strategic planning for various organizations (e.g. Econ dev committees, chambers, etc.)
- Chamber of Commerce - might drive the agenda using their ITAC sector initiatives
- Lobby our politicians to allocate resources to rural issues
- Help in your strategic planning "facilitation in conflict management"   Jim, David Douglas, Wayne Caldwell
- CAFS - Canadian Association for Food Studies - researchers & academics across Canada who are willing to take on identified research projects (see website)

1.

Appendix A – Rough Ideas for Question 1

What are the challenges and needs with respect to rural community and economic development and making the Wellington-Waterloo region a vital community (economic, social, health)?

Voting Results

Multiple Selection (maximum choices = 7) (Allow bypass)
Number of ballot items: 26
Total number of voters (N): 29

Rank	Issue	Comments	Total Votes
1	Quality of life	• Preserving quality of life (adequate and affordable housing, fulfilling employment, local services, environmental quality, transportation)...Core services in a rural area e.g. schools, docs, libraries, etc. support for villages & towns	20
2	Skills	• Developing skill sets relevant to the future of the community • Developing leadership and entrepreneurship • Does the skills training have a home for the people with the new skills? will I get a job when I am done • Diversification of skills and jobs and places to work, congruent with new businesses.	18
3	Youth retention	• Youth retention...Ensuring meaningful opportunities to attract youth back to rural communities ... provide opportunities for youth here, now	17
4	New business	• Attracting new & retaining businesses ... attracting knowledge based jobs	14
4	Funding	• How to finance municipal infrastructure • Fiscal capacity of municipalities to service communities ...inadequate provincial transfers	14
6	Transit	• Public transit & transportation -- Some areas not easily accessible to major transportation corridors ...Urban/Rural Accessibility Gap -- inequitable opportunities when compared to bigger cities	13
7	Local food	• Localize food economy to capture more wealth. ....No local food processing facilities	10
7	Farm Viability	• Keeping farming viable (economics, land use, ecology etc.)	10
9	Internet	• Broadband Internet	9
9	Culture	• Identifying and Protecting Cultural Identity/Assets • Quality of life through cultural development and festivals	9

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11	Energy prices	• Adapting to high energy prices	8
12	Changing sectors	• Changing (shifting) sectors ...The people losing their jobs in shifting sectors may not be capable of the new millennium jobs, what then? shifting of jobs from agriculture to bio tech	7
12	Services	• Access to appropriate and adequate prevention and health services on a community level.	7
12	Immigration	• Managing environmental refugees- immigration ....Adapting to climate change	7
15	Attitude	• Attitude toward change - reluctance, resistance to adapting	6
16	Development Practices	• Best Managing Practice for Development - are there lessons learned / best practices from each community	5
17	Green business	• Unable to attract new agricultural and 'green' businesses	4
18	Sustainability	• sustainability of natural and social resources on which the business is based	3
18	Economic Development	• No wellington county economic development ... in early development	3
18	Regulations	• Loss of economic opportunities in rural areas due to extensive regulations e.g. along Grand River (GRCA) e.g. greenbelt	3
18	Infrastructure	• Aging agricultural population	3
22	Accessibility funding	• Meeting accessibility legislation without funding (ODA)	2
22	Outmigration	• Out migration of workforce to other communities	2
22	Human resources	• Human resource capacity: number, $$, succession planning	2
26	Government	• Different government agencies not cooperating with one another	0

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: 21
> Total number of voters (N): 28

Rank	Issue	Questions	Total Votes
1	Farm revitalization	• What can we do to revitalize our farming/agricultural sector? • What strategies and opportunities are envisioned by farmers to keep their businesses viable?	16
2	Resilience	• What are the components of a resilient community? (Knowledge transfer models, attitudes and beliefs, infrastructure and supports)	13
3	Local food	• What local food processing needs and opportunities exist for local farmers and urban institutions? • Research potential local food distribution mechanisms	12
4	Municipal funding support	• What models successfully fund infrastructure in small communities? • In view of the present economic situation what is the financial risk to rural communities/areas	11
4	Local strengths	• How to turn the immense diversity (base industries) of Wellington and Waterloo County into strength? • What industries and services can be done most competitively here?	11
4	Market proximity	• How can Wellington County municipalities take advantage of being on the edge of the most populated area in Canada?	11
7	Skill sets	• What is the existing skill set of the commuters and unemployed? • To determine local capacity for potential attraction - ask the why not ! not why! ...what are the potential local economic opportunities available for the unemployed unskilled labour pool	10
7	Public transit	• What is the impact of public transit in rural areas? is there a benefit/cost win?	10

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9	Youth Retention	• What are some effective youth retention strategies? • From a youth perspective what would bring them home/adopted community (examples from other communities)	9
9	Cultural assets	• What are the cultural assets, what are they worth (intrinsically & economically), and to whom?	9
9	New economy skills	• How can communities transition into the new economy & what skills are most needed?	9
9	Local spending	• How do we encourage consumers to support the local economy in a society of big box stores?	9
13	Business opportunities	• Conduct a needs analysis for retail and commercial services -> gap analysis...attraction opportunities. • What types of businesses are needed in each area? What occupations will there be?	7
13	Agricultural Diversity	• Researchers need data. Who/how should we lobby Stats Canada for data pertaining to small towns? Can't get basic population, labour force data etc for areas for Towns within municipalities since amalgamations.	7
15	Geography, demographics and affluence	• What makes one region more affluent (gdp) than another when they are similar wrt geography and demographics. (business sector profiles, econ dev policies, conditions)	5
15	Senior engagement	• What and where is the best example of an active, engaged, (mentoring) seniors community?	5
17	Road use survey	• In Wellington County, how are roads being used (survey all sectors of the population)? What solutions do residents, businesses and planners envision?	4
17	Small business barriers	• What are the top road blocks preventing small businesses from being established in the Region?	4
19	Provincial-local policy collaboration	• Are there examples of provincial or other upper level governments working with local governments to develop policy?	3
19	Public Engagement	• Which areas are Rural/Transition/urban and what are the impacts of each type of area on the other?	3

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 Wellington-Waterloo 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 know 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.