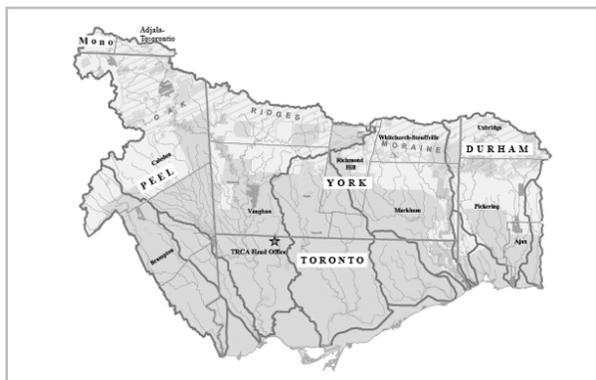


The Earth Charter as a Guiding Framework *Toronto & Region Conservation Authority, CANADA*

Background

Since its formation in 1946, the Toronto & Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) has become a partnership organization committed to protecting, restoring and celebrating the natural environment in the Toronto region through the development of watershed plans, innovative environmental science and education programs.

One of the most ambitious projects of TRCA is *The Living City Campaign*, a partnership with the Conservation Foundation, a local community-governed charity. Together with the Conservation Foundation, TRCA is committed to making the Toronto region a healthy place to live through the development and implementation of programs that protect and restore the integrity of the environment. TRCA joined thousands of organisations and individuals by endorsing the Earth Charter, a result of this project.



The area administrated by the TRCA

Aim

The main objectives of the project were to:

- Review existing TRCA policies and find ways of incorporating Earth Charter principles most relevant to the work of TRCA;

- Use the Earth Charter as a framework for strategic planning for TRCA activities, and also as a tool for the comprehensive review on challenges and opportunities facing TRCA in the decade ahead.

Participants

The main participants were TRCA staff, member municipalities, local governments and communities of the Greater Toronto Area.

Timeframe

The project was launched in 2002; its review and extensive consultations were carried out through 2003.

Description

In 2002-2003, the cross-organisational TRCA staff team was selected to undertake a process of comparing Earth Charter principles with existing TRCA policies to consider the use of the Earth Charter as a framework for TRCA activities and programs. The process involved a series of facilitated meetings where the team identified, analyzed, interpreted and debated those Earth Charter principles that were most relevant to the work of TRCA. The staff team chose principles that best resonated with, informed and advanced the TRCA's *Living City* programme objectives. The outputs from the process included a table documenting their findings, and two reports provided to the TRCA Board of Directors in preparation for a request to endorse the Earth Charter in time for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The TRCA Board is made up of local government representatives from each member municipality within the TRCA’s jurisdiction.

It should also be noted that the broader staff body was consulted through “lunch and learn” presentations.

The table below presents an example of how TRCA interpreted specifically relevant principles of the Earth Charter:

Endorsed Earth Charter Principles (Accepted and Especially Relevant to TRCA)	Earth Charter Sub-Principle	TRCA Staff Team Interpretation	TRCA Application
12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.	d. Protect and restore outstanding places of cultural and spiritual significance.	Natural landscapes, land forms and areas nurture and rejuvenate the human spirit, providing sacred space.	Through the TRCA’s archaeological department, historically sacred areas, such as burial grounds, are identified and protected. Natural places, vistas and land forms are protected and restored. Additional spiritual places need to be identified and protected in the rapidly growing Toronto region as part of the population’s spiritual well-being.

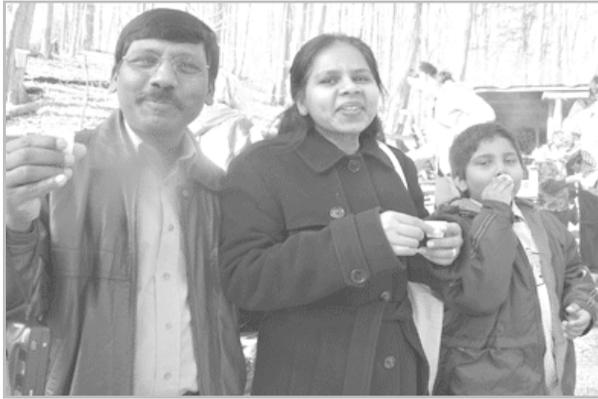
Funding

It is understood that the funding for the project was provided by the Toronto & Region Conservation Authority.

Results

The review that took place between 2002 and 2003 resulted in several achievements. First, it

provided a staff consensus and buy-in to the Earth Charter as a useful tool to better understand sustainability and related ethical issues and challenges in order to recommend endorsement of the document to the Board. Second, the outputs were used to prepare the organizational strategic plan for the years ahead. Third, it laid the foundation for a closer examination and application of the Earth Charter principles within key TRCA programs



Multicultural residents of Toronto at a celebration

(and departments) such as Environmental Education. Finally, it enabled TRCA staff to present and promote the Earth Charter to other local governments in their jurisdiction.

The TRCA Board of Directors endorsed the Earth Charter in June 2002. As part of the endorsement, the Board referred the Earth Charter onto the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. In return, most of the municipalities within the TRCA's area of jurisdiction endorsed or recognized the Earth Charter. A representative from the TRCA attended the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg to help advocate the applicability of the Earth Charter principles within local governments.

Following the WSSD, the process of designing the strategic plan took into account a summary of consultations and assumptions about the future. It helped to see clearly the challenges to be faced in pursuit of the conservation and sustainable development vision. The plan demonstrated that the Earth Charter would enhance TRCA's vision and the implementation of actions for a sustainable future.

The TRCA Environmental Education Programme was identified as the most appropriate department in which to place and focus the Earth Charter as an educational tool and also to support the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Conclusion

For TRCA, the Earth Charter provides a broad conception of sustainable development and sustainable living. It believes that public understanding of the Earth Charter's principles and values is essential for change towards sustainability. TRCA's process of identification, analysis, interpretation and debate on those Earth Charter principles that were most relevant to the work of TRCA, helped the effective delivery of their conservation mandate.

Sources: This case was directly drawn from the following materials:

- 'Type II partnership Questionnaire' by Lisa King, 2003.-
- Earth Charter Initiative website:
- 'The 2002 TRCA Annual Report', <http://www.trca.on.ca>
- The Earth Charter Initiative 2002-2003 Report.