

## CDES Presentation Notes

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Madam Chair, committee members and guests,

Thank you very much for this opportunity to talk with you about a project we are very excited about. This presentation is about 8 minutes long, after which we would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. We have quite a bit to cover, so let's get started.

We are here today representing a new citizens' organization in our city called Transition Guelph, one of a large and rapidly-growing community of Transition Towns now spreading across the globe. Transition Guelph was founded, as are all Transition Towns, in response to three challenges facing our society, challenges that are arguably the most significant of the last hundred years, and perhaps the greatest we've *ever* faced in our collective history.

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The first is this: Some time in the very near future, global oil production will reach a maximum, a point typically referred to as "Peak Oil." Thereafter production will enter a terminal and irreversible decline, opening an ever-widening gap between our society's demand for oil, and the ability of the global oil infrastructure to meet that demand, as shown here. For a society like ours that is almost completely dependent on oil, this represents an enormous potential for upheaval.

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This list may be familiar to you. Everyone knows the intimate link between petroleum and food production, transportation, energy, plastics, and so forth. This eighth point here is one that may not occur immediately: that *other* forms of energy we use, such as natural gas and electricity, and even renewables, are still dependent on oil.

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When you add ever-increasing climate instability, and global economic uncertainty, [click] we have what author James Alan Kunstler called, "The Long Emergency."

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That's the bad news. The good news is that, alongside efforts of forward-thinking municipalities such as Guelph, the Transition Towns initiative has emerged at the grass-roots level, and is now spreading virally across the globe. The movement began just over five years ago in the United Kingdom, and has now taken hold in at least 30 countries world-wide. The numbers continue to grow, week by week.

What is a Transition Town? A Transition Town is a community that is working together to address this key question:

*“For all those aspects of life that this community needs in order to sustain itself and thrive in the face of these challenges, how do we significantly increase resilience, drastically reduce our carbon output, and strengthen the local economy?”*

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Transition Towns are now the most renowned and widespread post-carbon cities model in the world. They are, in the words of founder Rob Hopkins: “scalable microcosms of hope”.

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They are founded on these key principles:

- That a future with much less available energy is inevitable;
- that our towns and cities currently *lack* the resilience to weather the shocks that this reduction will generate;
- that to build resilience we must plan and act proactively, together, and quickly;
- and, perhaps most importantly, that by doing so, we can create a future for ourselves and our children that is actually preferable to the oil-addicted treadmill of infinite growth and consumption that we find ourselves on today.

New Transition Initiatives are being established across the U.S, and hundreds more are in the formative stages. Canada, however, is a bit behind. Here there is currently only one official Transition Town, Peterborough Ontario.

But, we want to be the next one! Transition Guelph has now met all the criteria for official status and we have applied to the global Transition Network; we should be hearing back soon. It will be an exciting and inspiring moment when we get our official certification!

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Key to the Transition Movement is this concept of community resilience. Resilience is the ability of a system to withstand external shocks without suffering significant loss of function. Or, put another way, it is the ability to respond creatively to change. Resilient systems can adapt as needed when faced with external and internal challenges.

Resilient communities have a wide diversity of character and function, and can meet most of their needs locally, with far less dependence on external systems of uncertain reliability.

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Here are some of the projects and initiatives that Transition Guelph is currently undertaking, or planning for the near future. We recognize the need to engage a significant portion of the community at all levels, individuals, existing groups, neighbourhoods, businesses and local government, working together rather than each waiting for other sectors to take action. Hence the need for extensive awareness-raising, not only of the issues and challenges facing us, but also of the solutions. We need to speed up the building of a resilient infrastructure, with relocalized sources of food and energy, stronger local economies and distribution systems, and effective ways of getting people and goods around the city without reliance on depleting fossil fuels.

Once the initiative is well underway, with a high level of community awareness and projects on the ground, we can have what the Transition Handbook calls a “Great Unleashing,” a festive event that marks the city’s commitment to move forward together as a dedicated transition community.

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The ultimate goal is a community Energy Descent Plan, a detailed, coordinated, phased blueprint for redesigning the community to sustain itself, and thrive, in an environment of greatly reduced energy availability.

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Here are some of the areas in which Transition Guelph is already working. And...

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We believe that this work dovetails very well with our city’s forward-thinking strategic plan.

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Here are the key points of the strategic plan that you are familiar with...

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And here are areas in which Transition Guelph is working, and the congruencies that we see between these points.

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We see many exciting possibilities for collaboration with city programs, for example:

Working alongside Healthy Landscapes, Local Food Initiative and others on food security

And with the Neighbourhood Support Coalition on anti-poverty actions. We suggest emergency preparedness networks in neighbourhoods.

City-wide planning for growth and development can preserve and enhance growing spaces and multi-function community centers.

Under the CEP, perhaps a Lights-out-at-night initiative, local-scale production... Integrated use on the York Lands could include eco-village models designed with permaculture principles in mind.

The next Strategic Plan update could incorporate even more explicit Energy Descent planning.

And we hope you will consider official recognition of Transition Guelph by City Council.

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One important point of the Transition movement is that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, and certainly undesirable, to go it alone. Collaboration and cooperation at all levels are the keys to success, and are essential to the kind of true community we want to strengthen. Here are some of the groups with which Transition Guelph is already partnered or networking. Several communities in Ontario are actively engaged in sustainability and relocalization in response to peak oil and climate change, and we are in contact with them in a collaborative and mutually supportive network... including Transition Town Peterborough.

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To conclude: in the words of Transition Network co-founder Ben Brangwyn: We will be living in a lower-energy future, whether we want to or not. And it is certainly better to ride that wave...

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Than be engulfed by it.

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The bottom line is this: energy reduction is essential, and it is inevitable. Thanks to the Transition Town movement, we believe it's also very doable.

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Thank you very much Madam Chair, committee members, guests.

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Please remember, it's in our hands.

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We would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time, and we will be particularly interested in feedback or suggestions you may have for us.