

THE CITY OF TIMMINS SUSTAINABILITY CASE STUDY

Tom Laughren: Mayor
Steve Adams: Councillor



The City of Timmins case study offers useful lessons learned related to AMO's [Sustainability Planning Toolkit for Municipalities in Ontario](#) in particular with respect to Tool #1: Making the Case for Sustainability.

Not only has Timmins obtained the backing of its Mayor and Council, but improved economic sustainability has been achieved through an emphasis on quality-of-life variables and an investment in its people and infrastructure.

Timmins, a city in northeastern Ontario, has managed, despite the many challenges facing northern communities, to maintain a stable population of 43,000 over the past decade. As described below, its success has been based on a multi-dimensional approach to long-term sustainability focused on all of the pillars of sustainability – economic, environmental, cultural and social.

Sustainability Efforts Supported by Mayor and Council

Mayor and Council have been pro-active in their effort to develop and lead the City's aggressive sustainability efforts through a partnership with the Timmins Economic Development Corporation (TEDC). As the Mayor noted, "we believe sustainability is important and we want to be compliant with the Federal Gas Tax requirements." The City of Timmins is currently developing an integrated Sustainability Plan in conjunction with the TEDC.

Many communities have their EDCs, but Timmins' has been particularly successful in stimulating long-term sustainability because of a strong supportive Mayor and Council. Council currently allocates \$833,000 annually to the organization. Another element of its success has been the inclusion on the Board of senior-level, very active representatives from, among others, the mining industry, Northern College and the Chamber of Commerce. As one EDC member noted:

"In our case, TEDC showed success early on and there's nothing like success to generate support. It's important to have Council's support.... In our case, it's paid off... and the return on investment has exceeded the investment time and again"

The TEDC's contribution to economic sustainability is reflected in the following example, which shows how persistence, people and targeted investment in infrastructure have made a major difference:

"We had a U.S.-based tele-tech company here for several years. The City actually had constructed the building to attract the company and had invested in an (expensive) fibre optics cable to attract it here in the first place. However, recently, that company said they were moving out so we were left with a big building and no tenant. The TEDC already had several inquiries from call centres interested in locating here. It was purely coincidental that the enquiries were very close to the

Teletch closure announcement. We now have a Canadian call centre company from PEI, which will be starting with 200 employees and will hopefully employ 400 or more in future years. We were one of six places in competition and had to work very hard to convince the company that we were the number one site for their operation. They liked Timmins for a number of reasons. First, we have bi-lingual workers here, which is important for a Canada-wide operation. Second, Mayor and Council with support from the TEDC, rolled out the welcome mat. Third, the fact that the building was already there, that it was owned by the City and that it already had a fibre optics cable, were major advantages. They wanted a turnkey operation, so from their point, it was great. They could just move in.”

Another long-term sustainability investment of the TEDC was the “Discover Abitibi Initiative” (DAI), a collaboration between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments and private sector partners to complete geoscience surveys in the northeast region. The project represents a strong example of success with the leveraging of almost \$10 million dollars through government sources and pulling together close to \$3 million dollars in private sector contributions. Headed up by a member of the TEDC, the aim was to organize geosciences by undertaking mapping and early exploration to attract prospective mining interests by giving them a head start. The DAI has resulted in an overall investment in the Timmins area of more than \$33 million in the past four years and an increase of more than 70% in the number of companies operating here, many of which have reported using the data in their exploration programs.

Increased Sustainability Through the Emphasis on Improvements to Quality of Life Variables

The quality and diversity of people in Timmins have been real assets to long-term sustainability. Firstly, because of its aggressive success in leveraging funds to improve the community’s overall quality of life, Timmins has managed to attract and maintain highly qualified senior mining professionals as permanent residents that represent a good on-going resource for mining exploration companies. Secondly, the population is roughly 40% francophone.

Recognizing the value of a bilingual community, Timmins has actively sought a francophone post-secondary education facility and, as a result, it is getting a Francophone branch campus of Collège Boreal (Sudbury). “We were pursuing a University and Boreal wanted to expand to a bigger facility. A deal was negotiated between Boreal and with the Conseil Scolaire Grande Riviere. From there a discussion between the educational partners and the City took place to discuss location and servicing for the new multi million dollar campus. “ added Mayor Laughren. It is believed that the campus will help the city’s long-term sustainability by attracting students and generating good value-added jobs for youth. In fact, one of the stated reasons for Timmins’ success in attracting the PEI call centre (see above) against stiff competition was its ability to offer a bilingual labour force.

The emphasis on education as a long-term investment in sustainability has manifested in two other ways: There was a need for a new fire hall in one part of the city. Former Fire Chief Les Cudmore, with assistance from TEDC, managed to develop a win-win partnership with Northern College. The new fire hall will be located on campus so that those who want to be firefighters can train in an operational station that serves part of Timmins. It is hoped that the school will attract young people to Timmins who otherwise would not have come. Just as importantly, this partnership has enabled the city to consolidate

two volunteer firefighter brigades allowing them to realize immediate cost and operational efficiencies. Another investment in sustainability through education has been the successful pursuit of funding from FEDNOR to support the purchase of highly specialized diamond drilling technology for Northern College that will give it a competitive advantage over many/most other mining-related training facilities that do not have such equipment.

Again, Timmins has used some of its Federal Gas Taxes (FGT) to help improve the overall quality of life variables for its people, thus increasing long-term sustainability. The FGT's are funding transit proposals that will help streamline the operation, highlight cost efficiencies, and provide greater market intelligence related to the costly operation of a municipal transit system. There is some debate regarding the need for transit, but it is heavily used by Northern College students and by others who may not have/be able to afford, a car. Through the fare tracking system, the aim is to develop a more effective and streamlined, sustainable system.

Another element of success of Timmins is the recreational lifestyle it offers. Though there are negative environmental elements or perceptions often associated with the mining industry, nevertheless, the pristine surrounding area enables much of the population to own cottages never more than a stones throw away from the city centre.

Timmins represents a good example of the positive results that can take place when there is recognition at the highest level of government that investment should be not just in infrastructure, but in people and in services that improve the overall quality of life, which can materially contribute to a community's long-term sustainability.