

Ken-Ton Bee Article
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TONAWANDA SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

One of the hallmarks of our community is vision – to understand where we are and where we want to be – and a resolve to translate that vision into reality.

As a first-ring suburb that grew rapidly after World War II, the Town of Tonawanda has a set of challenges that touch all sectors of our community – demographic, housing, infrastructure, recreation, economy and education. In short, how we 'live, work and play'.

In recent months, we have embarked on two initiatives that will improve our quality of life. As cornerstones of the 'Tonawanda Sustainability Initiative', the E3 program and the Tonawanda Opportunity Area (TOA) will promote the growth of existing and new businesses, while improving our environment.

This article will frame the issues we seek to address through the E3 program, which stands for 'Economy, Energy and Environment'.

Since the early 1900s, large manufacturing facilities have been attracted to the Town of Tonawanda by an abundant supply of fresh water and ready access to both raw materials and markets. Other facilities were built nearby to meet the demands of these companies for energy, transportation, distribution, construction and other services. In time, this activity has resulted in one of the most concentrated centers of industry in the Buffalo Niagara region.

This concentration of facilities has had a significant impact on the community. Several multi-national companies provide employment for thousands of workers who live in Tonawanda and surrounding communities. Operating for decades before environmental regulations, these facilities have also had a severe, negative impact on the quality of air, water and land resources, affecting the health of residents.

In recent decades, however, several major facilities have closed (e.g. – Ashland Refinery, Wickwire Steel), technology has improved manufacturing processes and environmental regulations provide more control and oversight. Many corporations have adopted 'sustainable growth' as a cornerstone of their business practices. Public and private entities exist to assist companies become more competitive and, at the same time, reduce their environmental impact.

Although impacts are area-wide and cumulative, efforts have focused on individual facilities based on their interest, expertise and financial resources. Smaller manufacturers and businesses that provide support services (e.g. – transportation, distribution) are less likely to have personnel, financial resources and expertise to address opportunities.

A well-coordinated and collaborative effort of industry, government agencies and residents is necessary to increase participation by target companies, resulting in new economic activity and improved air, water and land quality for residents.

The federally-sponsored 'E3 Program' represents a tremendous opportunity to achieve these goals. At a recent meeting of the Tonawanda Town Board, we expressed support for this concept and representatives of the town are working to put this framework into place. In doing so, we will become a leader, not only in the state, but also in the country.