BACKGROUND

Adverse health impacts associated with environmental exposures has been a long-standing concern among stakeholder group representatives in Lambton County. Community leaders and stakeholders agreed that a study of the health effects associated with exposure to environmental contaminants is a public health priority.

In March 2007, County of Lambton staff was asked to secure the services of a facilitator to assist the stakeholder group in the development of a governance structure to oversee a health study in Lambton County. Following discussions and correspondence, the Corporation awarded a contract to Environmental & Occupational Health +Plus (EOHplus).

DISCUSSION

A Community Health Study workshop was hosted by EOHplus November 22, 2007 at the Village Inn, Point Edward to establish a governance body for the health study in Lambton County. The outcome of the governance workshop was agreement among workshop participants that there should be 14 bodies present at the table, 13 of which will vote (an Independent Process Observer will have a non-voting seat at the table).

It was also agreed by workshop participants that the Chair will be appointed from within. The general public will be represented by the Chair of the Community Round Table. St. Clair Township, the Village of Point Edward, County Council, the Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers, Aamjiwnaang First Nations, and Industry were asked to select a designate prior to the next Community Health Study meeting. Furthermore, invitations were to be issued to Kettle and Stony Point, and Walpole Island First Nations.

The inaugural board meeting for the Community Health Study was held on Thursday January 10, 2008 at Lambton Shared Services Centre.
In follow-up from the previous workshop, it was unanimously decided that the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) seat will be represented by the Victims of Chemical Valley, a seat will be added for the Chamber of Commerce, and the healthcare professional seat will be removed from the table. Individuals were nominated for the Chair, Vice-Chair and secretary positions. The governance structure and board positions are graphically described in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Governance Structure of Board for Community Health Study**

It was also decided that each seat would have one vote. An alternate will be named, but will remain silent unless speaking through the principle seat or in attendance as the principle seat. If the principle and alternate are both absent, no vote.

The board identified individuals from within the community that would make good candidates for the Independent Process Observer (IPO) role through a brainstorming and prioritization exercise. A sub-committee has been formed to approach these individuals prior to the next meeting.
EOHplus has proposed a stepwise process for a Community Health Study in Lambton County. The development of a governance structure is the first step to bring the study agenda forward with common goals through a participatory process. Establishment of a governance body will assist in providing a means to secure funding, develop communication strategies, and study questions. The study design and methodology will follow once study questions are determined. A framework to communicate the study results, manage the implications of any findings and delineate the criteria for success will also ensue.

The next meeting will be held Thursday February 28, 2008 at the County of Lambton Administration Building (Council Chambers) and agenda items will include the development of a Board Manual, an update on the IPO selection progress, roles and responsibilities of board members, and discussion of strategy to secure a funding source.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A draft list of funders has been identified. The agenda for the next meeting of the newly formed board includes a discussion on how best to approach potential funders.

CONSULTATIONS

The work to date has been the result of a number of meetings, chaired by Warden Burns, of interested stakeholders culminating in the workshop held November 22, 2007. The newly formed board agreed to continue facilitation with EOHplus consultants Michael Howes and Dr. Lesbia Smith.

STRATEGIC PLAN

A Community Health Study is consistent with the mission, principles and values and areas of effort identified in the Strategic Plan. The undertaking of a study supports the value of Lambton County as a healthy community.

CONCLUSION

Literature review of case studies completed by EOHplus consultants indicated that a successful Community Health Study requires a governance structure, a secure funding source, and measures of accountability. The process needs to be transparent, include consultation, scientific peer review, and involve independent study contractors and community participation, where appropriate.
Establishing a governance body marks the first step of a Community Health Study in Lambton County. The next steps, such as setting the study objectives, methodologies and securing a funding source can move forward with the governance body established.

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