

Climate Change Town Hall 2011 - Consumption

Key Points

1. General perspective on consumption

Consumption “intensity” appears to be growing and this has an increasing negative impact on climate because of the resources consumed in manufacture, transport, sale and use of these goods

- More electronics purchases
- More miles driven
- More square feet size of housing construction
- Culture of acquire and upgrade / throw away

We live in a consumer society based on global model (manufacturing in China, transportation to Hamilton for consumption)

There was some consensus that we should be moving to a “consumption based” model rather than the current “producer based” model to measure the real impact of Hamilton on global climate..

Political and economic factors drive a “growth economy”; growth appears to be the only acceptable model. It is driven by a potentially wrong perception that the only way to improve quality of life is to acquire / consume more “stuff” – as it drives more employment and income.

2. Conclusion / recommendation

A two pronged approach is needed

- A. **DECARBONIZE**: Given that there is little buy in and therefore political will to constraining consumption and a low / no growth steady state economy, we must urgently move to de-carbonize all of the dimensions of our society discussed in the other Town Hall topics – energy production & use, transportation, housing construction, water services, waste services, etc.

Some of the ideas to support this were

- a. Improved urban design enabling intensification thereby preventing urban sprawl and need to expand the urban boundary to accommodate growth
- b. Implementation of “extended producer responsibility” to reduce waste handling
- c. More work on conservation and efficiency
- d. Encouraging of local sourcing / local procurement

- B. **EDUCATE**: Because a growth based economy is not sustainable forever, we need to intensify efforts to educate Hamilton citizens on the impact of consumption and the need to move to a constrained consumption, lower/no

growth economy. To support this we need new measures of success in Hamilton – one idea was more emphasis on a “Gross Domestic Happiness” index than a GDP index.

- a. Need more data on consumption impacts based on the consumption model.
- b. Data on life cycle costs
- c. Data on social costs
- d. Examination of the incentives / disincentives to produce and consume less
- e. Better information on Citizen versus Industry impacts; if individuals feel that bulk of pollution comes from (steel) industry they will feel it is not worth doing much. Need to create stronger links between personal consumption and the industrial consumption it causes and resulting production of GHG
- f. Develop new measures of the “quality of life” of Hamilton citizens other than income and growth. Need to understand this does not apply to all in the same way; those living in poverty for example are impacted differently.

Discussion

- Less consumption
- What’s happening?
 - Growing
 - More consumable goods being purchased
- Increased vehicle traffic / more cars per family / larger homes – increased energy
- Data? What is the correct metric?
 - Low Carbon costs
- Environmental costs aren’t contained
- Consumption – based model
- Over consuming already, not as important to focus solely on the inventory
- Inventory as a tool to direct individual action on C.C. – need to know and we haven’t done a good job to tell them what their impacts are (people don’t get that they are the problem)
- Goods consumption is going up because people consume things (efficiency paradox)
- People won’t change their behaviour until it costs them more
- Growth of city drives up consumption regardless of per capita reductions.
- In order to make true change we need to develop carbonize the economy – need to go to this as no politician will vote for a no-growth scenario, therefore we have to transition from carbon.
- Consider consumption from demographics
 - Urban / Rural
 - High / Low income
 - Young / Old

- Consumption increase with growth but relatively less consumption with smart growth, compress urban boundary (Grow with)
- Fully recyclable products in our waste streams
- Incentives to local manufactures/ services for energy saving (Cab company goes hybrid)
- City push for full manufacturer responsibility
- We are consumption driven culture but sustainability is a growing driving force for innovation. Different motivations are driving small groups to adopt lower consumption lifestyles (more public education!)
- Dilemma is that encouraging reduced consumption comes with economic disincentives for city
- Quality of life question
 - Understanding quality of life is not driven by consumption
- Debt counselling (focus public attention on true sources of happiness)
- Collective strategies to reduce consumption are imperative. Can we grow benefits for citizens through economies of scale and finding synergies between local material needs/ streams
- Change the rubric of success for quality of life / satisfaction rather than growth/ Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
- Sponsor exchange mechanism / database of local resources / waste streams/ etc. to make it easier for local business and individuals to find local resources for reuse / repurpose
- Create Happiness Index for City of Hamilton
- Labelling for environmental impacts on products and true costing for products would both have significant positive benefits
- Perhaps since labelling of impacts on products and beyond the scope of the city purview, would it be possible to require impact/ footprint information for products (such as where manufactured, wastes in manufacture etc.) to be present as signage where products are sold?