

July 16, 2014

**Kemptville College at 97 years:
A Transformational Opportunity**

Thank you for the introduction and good evening Mr. Brown, Mr. Clark, Mayor Gordon, Mr. Vanclief, guests and colleagues. Over the past 15 weeks, it has been my privilege to work with a group of passionate, dedicated and talented individuals on the Renewal Task Force. As Marty has indicated, we have covered much ground to get to where we are today and yet, much work remains ahead of us.

From the outset, the Task Force wishes to thank Dr. Claude Naud for his dedicated service over the past four years. He set in motion many significant changes that put the campus on a sustainable path and unfortunately was not able to realize the goal before the closure announcement was made this past March. We would also like to thank Pat Remillard and Maureen Venables for their volunteer efforts in assisting the Task Force.

This evening, I will cover four areas:

- Context and the factors considered for the closure decision;
- The attractive qualities of Kemptville College;
- Lessons learned from other institutions that underwent a transformation; and.
- Our recommendations for the provincial facilitator.

1. Context and decision factors

In the fall of 1978 when I arrived on campus, there were 180 students enrolled in the first year of the agricultural program. Two years later, 120 of us graduated, along with 43 in the food service and home economics programs. This past spring, only 33 graduated from the two year agricultural program and there was not a graduating class in the food service program. Very clearly, operating an agricultural college with a declining enrollment of this magnitude is not sustainable.

In our deliberations, we met with several groups to learn what opportunities may exist given the natural advantages of Kemptville College. When we met with the executive director of the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Dr. Jim Brandle, one of the key questions that they asked at the outset of their renewal quest was: *“How did the Vineland Research Station lose its relevance?”*

It is fundamental to our success that in order to go forward with transformative change, we must first understand what caused the failure. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past.

For the Kemptville campus, many factors were at play. For example, consider the number of farms in Eastern Ontario today, and in turn the pool of potential students for the core agriculture program. When I returned to the farm in 1980, there were 180 dairy farms in Lanark County. Today, there are fewer than 40. For its core agricultural program, the Kemptville Campus has demographics working against it.

There are several other factors that when combined together resulted in the decision by the University of Guelph:

- A core agricultural curriculum that did not keep pace with change and suffered from low enrolment;
- Poorly ranked research programs in terms of size and scope;
- Outdated facilities and costly infrastructure, in addition to capacity issues that challenged growth;
- Expensive program delivery combined with funding frozen at 2007 levels;
- Lack of an international student program and inefficient use of residential and campus facilities;
- Competition from other schools for core programs, such as food science; and,
- Insufficient marketing, recruitment and development resources.

We want to underscore the point that staff and faculty had implemented plans to address many of these factors, but unfortunately the clock ran out of time.

2. *The attractive qualities of Kemptville College.*

It is also important to note that Kemptville has a number of successful and highly attractive programs. For example, the equine program is the only program of its type in Eastern Canada. The director has developed a focused program that has an appealing curriculum which is highly sought after. The same can be said about a number of the

trades programs. These programs were over-subscribed but are limited by infrastructure constraints.

Unfortunately, given the existing cost structure of the campus and restrictive funding arrangements, these successful programs alone are not enough to keep the campus sustainable. At the end of the day, more students are required to generate revenue and drive down the fixed costs per student.

Can this objective of creating a renewed sustainable Kemptville College be achieved? We believe so given the strengths of the college, the attributes that make it appealing and the learned opinions of those we have met with. Consider for example:

- It is a small college on a very attractive campus. This is an appealing attribute to many students.
- It has a well-equipped research facility, including field trials facilities, equine stables and riding arena, a maple syrup research facility and a modern dairy barn and research herd.
- It is located in the centre of a productive agricultural area with hundreds of related agri-businesses located in the vicinity – some of which are global leaders.
- A mile south of the campus is one of the oldest bull semen production and distribution centres in North America. As many of you will know, EastGen is a global leader in cattle genetics development and export.

- It is a short 45 minute drive to the downtown of a G-7 national capital – with embassies of over 150 countries – and a modern international airport. Indeed, the world is at our doorstep.

These and other strengths can be leveraged into effective, productive partnerships.

3. *Transformative Change and Lessons Learned*

As mentioned earlier, we visited the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre to learn how it reinvented itself. Once a leading fruit and horticulture research centre, this is an institution that fell upon hard times after successive budget cuts and benign neglect. Today, it concentrates on applied research with a laser-like focus on commercial innovation.

After visiting Vineland, we walked away with five key lessons for a transformed Kemptville College:

- Clearly understand the root cause of failure.
- Establish a robust representative board of directors and leadership who can bring about transformational change.
- Focus on the future growth opportunities.
- Build around a clearly defined purpose.
- Create and nurture strong partnerships.

Four years later the strategic vision has been realized: Vineland is an internationally recognized centre of horticulture research and innovation excellence, and a significant force in the delivery of horticulture innovation and technology.

Can we create a vision and strategic plan that will result in a new vibrant sustainable Kemptville College?

The Task Force believes that the fundamentals exist to achieve success. To realize success will require a different business model, revamped and different programs, new partnerships, new sources of students and investment in infrastructure and research programs.

We have seen other institutions transform and prosper in delivering agricultural education and research. For example, consider the success of Olds College in Alberta. What was a small regional agricultural college similar in size and mandate to Kemptville, it is now a vibrant institution with a student body of 1,350. In thinking about what Kemptville College could be, take a look at the partnerships that Olds has developed to deliver some of its programs and you will see some familiar names.

As Marty described to you, we have met with a number of groups and several would bring a critical component to a transformed Kemptville College in the form of a strategic partnership.

These potential partnerships would address:

- Curricula development and program delivery;
- Applied research in areas of relevant interest to agri-business;
- International training programs and foreign student recruitment; and,
- Partnership development, marketing, recruitment and administration.

Each component is critical to the overall success of a transformed Kemptville College. Each is an essential building block.

With these partnerships in place, the Task Force believes that the Government of Ontario would then be in the position to make the necessary infrastructure investments to address long-standing deficiencies. We also believe that with these building blocks in place, alumni and business would be willing to invest in program delivery for education and endowed research chairs – both of which are fundamental to a sustainable future.

4. Our recommendations for the Provincial Facilitator

In conclusion, Mr. Vanclief, as you begin work on your mandate, the Task Force wishes to present the following recommendations:

- That a Stakeholder Advisory Panel of leading business and community members is established to advise on a transformative model for Kemptville College to deliver research and education programs that are focused on high growth/high demand segments in agriculture, agri-food, equine, horticulture and associated trades.
- That the renewed Kemptville College is founded on strategic partnerships that will leverage the strengths and capabilities of each organization.
- The Province of Ontario support the request of the Municipality of North Grenville to administer Kemptville College on an interim basis during the period of transformative change.

Allow me to conclude with the following observations in a report prepared by the global consulting firm KPMG which identified the characteristics of leading universities and colleges. These leaders will:

- Deliver strategically important, but financially efficient teaching in collaboration with other institutions.
- Have focussed and sustainable internationally recognised research that is delivered through a partner network.
- Use back office services that are commissioned from external providers.
- Employ a mobile and flexible workforce, some of which work jointly with other institutions.
- Use a flexible model for the provision of facilities.

If we are to succeed as a community, these are the characteristics of a transformed Kemptonville College.

The Task Force appreciates the opportunity to present these findings and recommendations and looks forward to continued dialogue – and most importantly, laying the groundwork for the celebration of Kemptonville College’s centenary in 2017.

Thank you.