



Comprehensive Guide

for **Municipal
Sustainability
Planning**

June 2006



Alberta Urban Municipalities Association



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Executive Summary

Alberta communities are facing many challenges. On one hand, some communities are facing challenges just to survive into the future, including depopulation, lack of employment opportunities, and a lack of cultural and educational opportunities for young people. On the other hand, some communities are facing the challenge of dramatic growth that can lead to ever-increasing costs to build and maintain infrastructure and to a decreasing sense of connection with fellow citizens.

Challenges are not new to Albertans. Since the first settlers that traveled west, Albertans have always had a pioneering spirit and a positive attitude. As Alberta celebrated its 100th birthday in 2005, Albertans had the opportunity to reflect with pride on the unprecedented change of the past century and on the great province that Alberta has become. This type of reflection also causes pause to consider the future and ask “what the future will bring us?”

The future is not something we enter. The future is something we create.

- Leonard I. Sweet, Author/Futurist

Municipal sustainability planning is an opportunity for municipalities to proactively address these challenges and move towards a sustainable future, one where a strong *economy* and participative *governance* models protect *ecological* integrity, contribute to a vibrant *cultural* scene and strong *social* cohesion.

Municipalities that have been successful with sustainability planning engage their citizens to determine what their community would look like if it were sustainable and then to identify and implement steps towards this future. Although there is no single way to develop a Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP), there are some common elements to the experiences of communities that have created long-term integrated sustainability plans outlined below.

Municipal officials are being provided with an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in the area of long-term, strategic, sustainable planning. Alberta communities will benefit from embarking on this planning exercise, as strong planning will yield positive results for our communities. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) is pleased to provide assistance to its members in taking up the challenge of planning for community sustainability.

Phase I: Structuring the Planning Process

In this phase, municipal Council, commits to developing an MSP, determines its scope, and provides the necessary resources the planning process, including staffing requirements. The support and leadership of Council is critical to the success of the planning initiative. Council is advised to consult citizens throughout the process, and may decide to form a Citizens Advisory Group (CAG). A CAG would consist of community leaders, including councilors and municipal staff, to bring additional resources and influence to create and implement a plan. The CAG will vary in size and complexity, depending on the size, capacity and/or commitment of the community.

Phase II: Creating a Shared Understanding of Sustainable Community Success

After structuring and providing resources to the process, the Council and community adopt sustainability principles and engage citizens to develop a shared understanding of success through a dialogue about the community's vision, core values, and goals it has for the community's social, cultural, environmental, economic and governance aspects.

Phase III: Determining and Analyzing Issues to Community Success

After creating a shared vision of the future, the community identifies a number of strategy areas that need to be addressed to achieve the vision. For each strategy area, Council, with the aid of citizens, may decide to set up small task forces with partner organizations. The size and number of task forces will vary by community. For example, some communities may simply use sub-committees of Council or the CAG instead of forming separate task forces. The benefit of such groups is that they can bring additional resources through partner organizations to support implementation once the plan is completed. The role of the task forces is two-fold:

1. to describe what that strategy area would look like in the community if the vision was achieved, i.e. "success", and;
2. to describe the community's "current reality" in that strategy area.

The point of working on these two descriptions is to develop creative tension, in other words a gap in participants' minds between current reality and future success. For example, some communities may identify "Water" as a key strategy area for their community. In this case, Council and citizens describe the characteristics of their community's water system if they achieved their sustainability vision, and then describe the current reality of "Water" in their community. This creative tension will aid in generating new ideas for initiatives and investments to "bridge the gap", which is the focus of the next phase.

Phase IV: Identify Initiatives to Move from Current Reality towards Success

At this point, the Council and citizens have described *current reality* and *success* in their strategy areas, and set the stage for brainstorming a series of initiatives and investments in each area. Once the Council and citizens brainstorm potential initiatives and investments, these should then be screened and prioritized to ensure that they:

- 1) ...move the community towards its vision considering all five dimensions/pillars of sustainability.
- 2) ...move the community towards the sustainability principles.
- 3) ...provide flexibility for future community leaders to take action.
- 4) ...generate sufficient economic and political return, with a foundation in good governance to seed future investments.

Ideas that meet these criteria are good short-term initiatives or investments that set the stage for future steps. Since the municipal sustainability planning process is a municipal initiative, the Council is responsible for leading the community to take responsibility for implementation. At this stage partner organizations could take responsibility for certain initiatives, either by leading or supporting implementation.

Once priority initiatives have been identified, the municipality scans the full list of proposed investments and compiles them into an overarching plan of investment for the



community that will take it in a step-by-step manner toward its vision forming the basis for the MSP.

Phase V: Ongoing Monitoring and Implementation

Once the plan is complete, the municipality monitors the progress of the plan and implements the actions laid out in the plan along with partner organizations. This generally consists of meetings of the Council, sometimes with citizens or the CAG, to review responsibilities outlined in the plan and make necessary adjustments based on these reviews. In addition, the Council can consider how the vision and other elements of the plan can be further integrated into the operations of the municipality.



Introduction

This document is part of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association's (AUMA) overall support role for its municipal members. The purpose of this Guidebook is to provide guidance for communities to develop a Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP). Although there is no "one-size fits all" way to develop an MSP, this document will provide a broad overview of a process to develop an MSP and provide tools and resources within each step in this process.

Since there is no one-size-fits-all strategy to develop MSPs, this Guidebook is only one part of a larger strategy that includes ongoing technical assistance in developing MSPs, workshops and education sessions on the topic of sustainability, and enhancements to the Guidebook and Tools.

A Municipal Sustainability Plan is essentially a high level overarching document that guides the community into the future. It can best be viewed as a strategic business plan for the community that identifies short, medium, and long term actions for implementation, tracks and monitors progress, and is reviewed and revised on an annual basis. An MSP, therefore, provides guidance for the development or alignment of all municipal plans and documents (i.e. municipal development plan, transportation plan, municipal energy plan, purchasing policy, capital planning etc.).

Why Municipal Sustainability Planning?

The first question many ask about Municipal Sustainability Planning is: "why should I do it?" This is a very good question in light of the day-to-day operational challenges that communities face. In short, MSPs provide an opportunity for communities to reflect on what they want for their community and to move proactively towards this desired state, rather than reacting to problems as they arise.

Challenges Facing Albertan Communities

Alberta communities are facing a wide range of challenges. While some communities are facing challenges with economic decline, others are facing challenges with dramatic growth.

The Challenge of Growth

Many Alberta communities are facing the challenge of managing growth. Rapid growth in communities has led to a number of potentially negative consequences for communities and their citizens¹, including:

¹ Bolstad, Allan. (2005). "The Alberta Smart Growth Report". *Sierra Club of Canada*. [Online] Available: <http://www.sierraclub.ca/prairie/SierraReport.pdf> (December 20, 2005) and

AUMA. (2005). "Municipal Infrastructure Construction Discussion Paper".

Available : <http://www.munilink.net/policy/DiscussionPapers/MunicipalInfrastructureConstruct.pdf>

- conflicts due to land use;
- high costs for governments to develop and maintain the necessary infrastructure and to provide services and facilities;
- when municipal infrastructure investments are made possible, the difficulty of engaging a qualified and skilled labour force to carry out projects in a timely manner;
- reduced air quality and significant increases in greenhouse gas emissions;
- higher household expenses and diminished public health due to increasing use of automobiles;
- difficulty for residents who don't drive, including children and seniors, to access community services in the absence of bus service;
- the collection of large amounts of storm water, which impacts groundwater levels and challenges local treatment systems;
- increased neighbourhood dysfunction, as reduced local activities destroy community networks and inhibit crime prevention.

The Challenge of Decline

In a recent report, a representative group of Albertans from both urban and rural communities was interviewed about their views on the challenges and opportunities in small urban/rural communities in Alberta². In response to the question “*what do you see as the challenges for rural Alberta?*” the interviewees listed off many, including:

depopulation, lack of employment opportunities, encroachment of urban areas onto agricultural land, lack of opportunity for young people, young people moving away from rural areas, lack of essential services and infrastructure, lack of economic diversity, concern with drought, BSE and other diseases, resistance to change, sustainability, confined feeding operations (CFOs), demographics and aging populations, lack of technological capacity, loss of family farms, loss of communities, concern for water supply and quality, lack of economic diversity, the concentration of power in large, foreign agribusiness companies, and shrinking population

In short, Alberta communities face a wide range of challenges.

At the same time, when interviewees were asked “*if you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about rural Alberta, what would you change?*” The responses (Table 1) included a wide range of ideas dealing with social, economic, cultural, and environmental issues. Not surprisingly, there are a lot of ideas and enthusiasm for how to address the challenges facing Alberta communities.

² Martin, J. & Brost, L. (2004). Growing the Future: Tomorrow's Rural Alberta. Rural Education and Development Association. [Online]. Available: <http://www.rural.gov.ab.ca/research/bridgebuildersreport.pdf> (December 20, 2005)

Table 1: A sample of responses from Albertans about desired changes

<p>'Give children the same opportunities that urban children have.'</p> <p>'When I'm an adult, I'd like to see a fair price for food so I could make a living as a farmer.'</p> <p>'Tighter environmental controls on land use.'</p> <p>'Meet needs locally and rediscover community self-reliance. Sustainable communities.'</p> <p>'I wish that there were a way to offer more educational opportunities for our kids. What would happen if Bach or Beethoven was growing up in Pincher Creek and we didn't have a music program?'</p> <p>'I would change mental attitudes. So many farmers are stuck in a rut.'</p>	<p>'I would create sustainable communities with balanced demographics. Bow Island has 1700 people. Over 1000 are over 50 years old.'</p> <p>'I would change farming methods so that all agriculture would be done in a regenerative manner.'</p> <p>'I'd want the people making decisions about the environment to care about it as much as I do.'</p> <p>'I would change the rigidity of the people who are married to a certain belief and value set and make them open to different ways of doing things.'</p> <p>'I'd make it more entrepreneurial, with new products produced and marketed by rural people.'</p>
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The report also asked interviewees about the whether they would “reinvent” or “renew” rural Alberta. Although the recommended scope of renewal or reinvention of rural Alberta differed, the interesting thing to note is that **no one responded that rural Alberta should remain the same as it is today.**

There are no quick fixes to the challenges of decline and growth, and in today's increasingly complex and interrelated world, solutions require collaborative and integrated approaches.

Municipal Sustainability Planning: An Opportunity

"The future is not something we enter. The future is something we create."

- Leonard I. Sweet, Author/Futurist

Municipal Sustainability Planning is an opportunity for communities to look long-term at the community they want and take the proactive steps to move there. It is an opportunity to engage citizens in a dialogue about what they value about their communities and what they want their community to look like in the future. It is an opportunity to provide an outlet for the wisdom and expertise of community members to discover innovative solutions that address social, economic, cultural and environmental challenges today while leaving a positive legacy for future generations.

The AUMA's Five Dimensions of Sustainability

In its broadest terms sustainability can be defined as *living in a way that meets our needs without undermining the ability of our children and our children's children to meet their needs.*³ In order to achieve sustainability, communities must plan with an understanding of the consequences of its actions today on the future.

The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) encourages communities to consider five dimensions when thinking through the sustainability of their communities: *social, cultural, environmental, economic, and governance*. These dimensions are consistent with other literature on community sustainability, although the ways in which these dimensions are described differ. For example:

- ...The Natural Step suggests that sustainability is achieved when society is able to meet basic human needs, including social, cultural and physical, within environmental constraints, and that the transition to such a society must be economically resilient.⁴
- ...Infrastructure Canada suggests that sustainability consists of four dimensions, social, cultural, environment, and economy.⁵
- ...The EarthCAT Guide to Community Development suggests that community sustainability is about meeting basic human needs in the following five categories: social needs, governance needs, economic needs, services and infrastructure, environmental needs.⁶
- ...Simon Fraser University Center for Sustainable Community Development describes six forms of community capital that are essential for sustainable communities: natural, physical, economic, human, social, and cultural. They are referred to as capital, because sustainable communities should strive to live off the interest rather than drawing down the capital in each of these areas.⁷

Of the five dimensions, two are necessary throughout the journey towards sustainability starting today; these are:

- governance structures that are participative and inclusive; and
- economic sustainability.

The reasons for this are simple. Without strong and inclusive governance systems, citizens will feel excluded and maybe even resentful of governments, a situation in which

³ Adapted from the Brundtland Commission definition of sustainable development, which reads "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

⁴ James, S. (2004). p. 9

⁵ Infrastructure Canada (2005).

⁶ Hallsmith, G., Layke, C., & Everett, M. (2005). Taking Action for Sustainability: The EarthCat Guide to Community Development. Global Community Initiatives. [Online]. Available: <http://www.earthcat.org/> (December 20, 2005)

⁷ Roseland, M., Towards Sustainable Communities: Resources for Citizens and Their Governments. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers. p. 13

change and renewal is difficult, if not impossible. Inclusive decision-making processes tap into the wealth of expertise and knowledge that exist within a community. Similarly, a depressed community without a strong economy cannot easily contribute to a healthy environment, a strong social fabric and a vibrant cultural scene. Conversely, a strong economy is not an end unto itself, it must contribute to communities that are strong in all five dimensions of sustainability, where

- social needs of all are met,
- there is a strong cultural scene that breeds creativity and innovation, and
- natural laws and environmental constraints are respected so that the basis for life, a healthy ecosystem, is protected.

This concept of sustainability forms the basis for the AUMA's approach to sustainability. To realize sustainability the following pages outline an approach based on a concept called "backcasting", which simply means that a group *first* develops a shared understanding of success and *then* uses this understanding as a guide takes pragmatic steps towards that future (see *Tool A: Backcasting Elaborated*). When backcasting towards community sustainability, there are two important components that need to be developed:

- i) ... a **shared understanding of a successful future** in which a strong social fabric weaves through communities ensuring that fundamental human needs are met, a vibrant cultural scene breeds creativity to drive innovation, ecological integrity is protected and there is a strong economy; and
- ii) ... a **plan of action** that consists of practical investments that make economic sense today⁸ and that serve as steps towards the shared understanding of a successful future that is environmentally, socially, and culturally sustainable.

A suggested process to develop these components is elaborated in the rest of this guidebook.

⁸ This is not simply a matter of whether the investment has a positive return on investment in the short-term. Initiatives should also take into account how to avoid long-term risks, e.g. resulting from trends such as increasing energy and waste disposal costs, stricter legislation or increasing stakeholder demands.

Overview of the Process

Introduction

There is no single way to develop a Municipal Sustainability Plan and each community will tackle it differently. This section will introduce the elements common to successful MSPs, and provide a broad overview of a process that takes these elements into account. The rest of the document will elaborate on different elements of the planning process and refer to additional tools and resources in the Tools relevant to that phase.

Common Elements of Successful MSPs

Some common elements of successful Municipal Sustainability Plans⁹ include:

Political will to commit resources: Having the political will to implement the plan accompanied by an adequate commitment of financial and personnel resources. Although the process is meant to engage the broader community, its success or failure will rest on the leadership and support of Council to the process. This leadership will be called upon throughout the process to provide guidance and steer the process in case problems arise. It is for this reason that AUMA will also offer an alternate and less comprehensive Guidebook for Municipal Sustainability Planning. Before municipal leaders choose the leadership path that includes full engagement of the community, the role and obligations of the municipal leaders must be fully understood and committed to. Sustainable community/municipal planning can begin with a shorter process than the one found in this version of the Guidebook.

Vision-Led Process: A desired vision of a successful outcome that generates energy and enthusiasm and gives purpose and meaning to inspire the contribution of time and effort.

Backcasting: Backcasting means starting first with the desired outcome in mind *and then* identifying present-day actions to move in the direction of that outcome. The outcome, or “vision”, should also be consistent with sustainability principles to ensure that the basis for our economy and livelihood, i.e. natural systems and the materials and services they provide, are protected for future generations to access.¹⁰

Picking the low-hanging fruit: Low-hanging fruit are those actions that garner early agreement, are obtainable in the short-run, and can demonstrate success to generate momentum. In a community, this can be something as basic as getting a group together to clean up a visible vacant lot.

Democratic process: At the heart of Municipal Sustainability Planning is a commitment to a bottom-up participatory change process that engages citizens in designing the specific steps to move toward the desired vision. Using a democratic, participatory

⁹ Including: Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). (2003). *Citizen Participation and Community Engagement in the Local Action Plan Process: A Guide for Municipal Governments*. [Online] Available: <http://www.fcm.ca/english/gmf/publications.html> (December 27, 2005); International Council for Local Environmental Alternatives (ICLEI). (2002). *Second Local Agenda21 Survey: Background Paper No. 15*. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and James, S & Lahti, T. (2004). pp. 200-201

¹⁰ More information on backcasting can be found in *Tool A: Backcasting Elaborated*.

process to involve the “implementers”, i.e. partner organizations who will be responsible for implementing parts of the plan, is key to successful adoption and implementation of actions toward change.

Leading from the side: This describes a particular leadership style taken by process leaders that allows planning and action plans to emerge from the process, rather than imposing predetermined strategies or projects. Leadership from the side provides clear guidelines, then elicits ideas from participants for how to apply them.

Taking a systems approach: The approach to change is comprehensive and integrated, aimed at bringing about change throughout the range of planning areas. A conventional, less effective approach addresses issues on a one-by-one basis.

Broad involvement: A wide representation of community participants takes part both in the creation of a positive vision and in the steps toward achieving that vision. Broad involvement of citizens and implementers helps assure that change will happen, since those responsible for making it happen are involved in shaping the proposals from their beginning, again the idea of “involving the implementers”.

Keeping it going: Planning in cycles, testing early action proposals, ongoing education and training programs, monitoring the effectiveness of actions with indicators, all guided by the vision and sustainability principles, help institutionalize change and keep adopted practices going over time.

Suggested Process Overview

Based on the elements mentioned above, a suggested process to develop an Municipal Sustainability Plan with five main phases is summarized below (Figure 1)¹¹. The rest of this document will provide more details on suggested process steps of each phase. The process is designed to be led by municipal council and participative to access the vast knowledge in the community to help determine the best investments towards sustainability. Citizen engagement and the development of partnerships with key community leaders and organizations are integral to each step of process.

Phase I: Structuring the Planning Process

In this phase, municipal Council commits to developing an MSP, determines its scope, and provides the necessary resources the planning process, including staffing requirements. Council should discuss and evaluate their readiness to fully engage in developing a comprehensive sustainability plan. Council should set out its objectives in undertaking a municipal sustainability plan, which will assist in understanding the value of a comprehensive vs. a more simple planning process. The support and leadership of Council is critical to the success of the planning initiative.

Should Council decide to embark on a comprehensive municipal sustainability planning effort, they are advised to consult citizens throughout the process, and may decide to form a Citizens Advisory Group (CAG). A CAG would consist of community leaders,

¹¹ Please see *Tool Z: List of Resources* for books and documents review to develop the suggested process. In addition to these resources, the authors have reviewed a number documents from municipalities and have had conversations with practitioners not listed in the Tool.



including councilors and municipal staff, to bring additional resources and influence to create and implement a plan. The CAG will vary in size and complexity, depending on the size, capacity and/or commitment of the community.

Phase II: Creating a Shared Understanding of Sustainable Community Success

After structuring and providing resources to the process, the Council and community adopt sustainability principles and engage citizens to develop a shared understanding of success through a dialogue about the community's vision, core values, and goals it has for the community's social, cultural, environmental, economic and governance aspects.

This generally occurs in three steps:

1. the community is given an opportunity to input by reflecting on the community's values and what they want the community to become;
2. the input is synthesized into a statement of vision with the aid of citizens, which Council approves; and
3. the statement of vision is shared broadly and celebrated within the community.

Phase III: Determining and Analyzing Strategy Areas for Community Success

After creating a shared vision of the future, the community identifies a number of strategy areas that need to be addressed to achieve the vision. For each strategy area, Council, with the aid of citizens, may decide to set up small task forces with partner organizations. The size and number of task forces will vary by community. For example, some communities may simply use sub-committees of Council or the CAG instead of forming separate task forces. The benefit of such groups is that they can bring additional resources through partner organizations to support implementation once the plan is completed. The role of the task forces is two-fold:

1. to describe what that strategy area would look like in the community if the vision was achieved, i.e. "success", and;
2. to describe the community's "current reality" in that strategy area.

The point of working on these two descriptions is to develop creative tension, in other words a gap in participants' minds between current reality and future success. For example, some communities may identify "business revitalization" as a key strategy area for their community. In this case, Council and citizens describe the characteristics of their community's economy and businesses if they achieved their sustainability vision, and then describe the current reality of "businesses" in their community. This creative tension will aid in generating new ideas for initiatives and investments to "bridge the gap", which is the focus of the next phase.

Phase IV: Identify Initiatives to Move from Current Reality towards Success

At this point, the Council and citizens have described *current reality* and *success* in their strategy areas, and set the stage for brainstorming a series of initiatives and investments in each area. Once the Council and citizens brainstorm potential initiatives and investments, these should then be screened and prioritized to ensure that they:

- 1) ...move the community towards its vision.
- 2) ...move the community towards the sustainability principles, considering all five of the sustainability pillars.
- 3) ...provide flexibility for future community leaders to take action.



- 4) ...generate sufficient economic return, with a foundation in good governance, to seed future investments.

Ideas that meet these criteria are good short-term initiatives or investments that set the stage for future steps. Since the Municipal Sustainability Planning process is a municipal initiative, the Council is responsible for leading the community to take responsibility for implementation. At this stage partner organizations could take responsibility for certain initiatives, either by leading or supporting implementation.

Once priority initiatives have been identified, the municipality scans the full list of proposed investments and compiles them into an overarching plan of investment for the community that will take it in a step-by-step manner toward its vision forming the basis for the MSP.

Phase V: Ongoing Monitoring and Implementation

Once the plan is complete, the municipality monitors the progress of the plan and implements the actions laid out in the plan along with partner organizations. This generally consists of meetings of the Council, sometimes with citizens or the CAG, to review responsibilities outlined in the plan and make necessary adjustments based on these reviews. In addition, the Council can consider how the vision and other elements of the plan can be further integrated into the operations of the municipality.

The rest of the guidebook elaborates on each phase. Figure 1, below provides a flowchart view of the process.



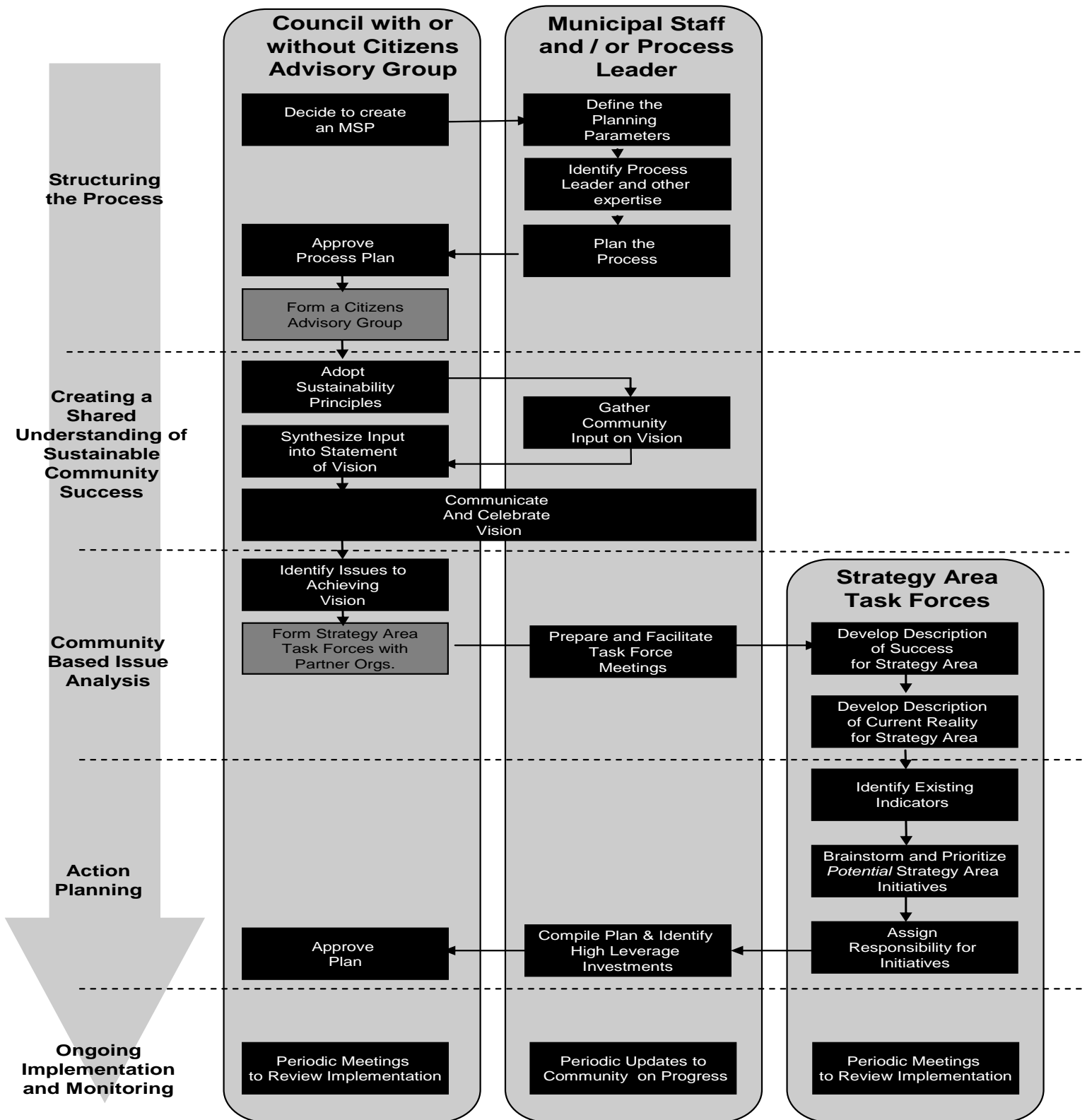


Figure 1: Process Flow Chart. The steps shaded in gray represent opportunities for Council to bring in resources and expertise through an advisory committee and / or task forces. The role of these groups is taken by Council (and possibly some citizens), if Council does not wish to form these groups.



Phase I: Structuring the Process

“Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up.”

- A. A. Milne, Humorist

Introduction

Assuming the Council and municipal leadership understand and can commit to the need for and value of embarking on a comprehensive municipal sustainability plan, it is important for Council to structure the planning process by making key decisions about who will manage it, whether it is a regional or municipal initiative, defining who should be included, and setting a schedule.

In this phase, many communities who have engaged in a participative planning process have formed citizens' advisory groups (CAGs). A CAG consists of councilors, key municipal staff, and other community leaders whose influence and resources will bring additional leadership to bear on the process. Council may consider inviting other community leaders to form a CAG, although it is not a substitute for the leadership of Council.

Desired Outcome

The outcome of this phase is:

1. a staff resource or volunteer is identified to serve as the manager of the project;
2. a process for the development of the plan is created; and
3. potentially a committee of community champions, or Citizens Advisory Group, is formed to provide guidance to municipal staff during the planning process

Suggested Process Steps

1) Structuring the Planning Process		
Step:	Deliverable:	Tools / Worksheets:
1. Committing to do an MSP	Resolution to develop an MSP	<i>Tool G: Council Resolution</i>
2. Determine the Parameters	Scope of the plan identified	
3. Identify a Process Leader and Other Expertise	Process Leader Identified	<i>Tool B: Participant Engagement Lessons</i>
4. Form a Citizens Advisory Group (CAG)	Citizens Advisory Group Formed	<i>Tool C: Citizen Advisory Groups Guidance</i>
5. Plan the Process	Schedule that defines roles, timelines and budget for the planning process	<i>Tool D: Stakeholder Analysis Workshop</i> <i>Tool E: Integrating Existing Planning Processes</i>
2) Creating a Shared Understanding of Sustainable Community Success		
3) Determining and Analyzing Strategy Areas for Community Success		
4) Action Planning		
5) Ongoing Integration and Implementation		

1. Committing to do an MSP

As simple as this may appear, this is a very important step. Deciding to engage in a participative planning process means that Council is making a statement that they will provide leadership and commit the proper resources to the process to make it successful and steer the process through problems that may arise.

Although the process is meant to be participative and involve citizens to bring additional knowledge, influence and resources to find solutions to issues, they are there to support Council. Leadership for the process ultimately rests with Council. If Council commits to developing an MSP, it can outline this in a resolution (see *Tool G*).

2. Determine the Planning Parameters

It is important to determine the parameters of the planning process at the outset. This includes first and foremost determining what “community” will be considered in the MSP. Usually, this will be defined by political boundary. Other times, however, its natural features, such as a watershed, viewshed, or mountain range, may characterize the community more. Alternatively, it could be an economic network encompassing, for instance, a wide commuting area or a metropolitan planning boundary. It might be a town–village cluster, or a wider inter-municipal region. If the intent is to develop and implement a plan for a regional community that does not have a political boundary, be

sure to take into account the buy-in necessary from multiple political entities, and to allocate extra time and resources accordingly.¹²

3. Identify a Process Leader and Other Expertise

Before starting, it is also important to identify a **Process Leader**. Above all, the Process Leader must believe in the process that will be followed, and be committed to achieving a sustainable community. Ideally, the Process Leader has the abilities to run meetings, resolve conflicts, bring people to the process, and earn respect. This person does not necessarily need to be an employee of the municipality or a councilor, although the process leader must have the endorsement of Council.¹³

Another role to consider is a **Process Manager** to support the Process Leader by organizing and running meetings, and bringing technical resources into the process. Ideally, this person has:

- Strong process skills for making meetings work and moving people towards agreement: no amount of technical understanding can substitute for ability to make group processes productive;
- Understanding of the content of what is being planned: "facilitators" without content background have not proven effective at this kind of process; and
- Respect of those who do have stakes in the outcomes.

Consider the Process Leader as the figurehead who can lead the overall process and has a keen grasp of local politics, and the Process Manager as someone who has highly tuned skills to manage meetings. Both the Process Leader and Process Manager can be carried out by a single person, but be careful, because it is rare for the necessary qualities all to lie in a single individual.

In addition, **technical support** is always helpful. The AUMA will provide technical support in the form of MSP Guidebook & Tools, workshops and advice over the phone. Other orders of government may have resources they can provide, for example Alberta Community Development has a group of trained facilitators to support communities. It may come from local staff, though many municipalities are short of staff resources. Support may come at little or no cost from a university or non-profit organization. Often there are programs in such organizations eager to find applications in community-based projects. Finally, technical support may come from consultants, if municipal budgets will permit it.

Lessons learned from Process Leaders and Process Managers on participant engagement can be found in *Tool B: Participant Engagement Lessons*.

¹² Hallsmith, G. et al. (2005). p. 24

¹³ For example, in Canmore, the municipality works closely with a locally based non-governmental association, the Biosphere Institute for the Bow Valley, on many of its sustainability initiatives. On the other hand, depending on the size and complexity of the planning process, a municipality may want to dedicate additional staff. For example, the City of Calgary has a staff of ten people dedicated to their *ImagineCalgary* long-term visioning exercise.

4. Form a Citizen Advisory Group (CAG)

In this phase, Council may choose to form a Citizens Advisory Group¹⁴ (CAG) as a way to bring on the influence and resources of other organizations in the community, e.g. a school, economic development authority, or local arts organization. A CAG is a group of citizens who are leaders in the community, including councilors and municipal staff. **The CAG is not a substitute for the leadership of Council**, although Council might consider forming a CAG for the following reasons:

- **Resources for Implementation:** Later on in the process, once the plan is written and the community moves into the implementation stage, partner organizations will play an important role to implement the certain initiatives and investments. Involving stakeholders from the onset ensures that they will be on board when it comes time to implement the plan and that the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the community have been properly addressed. For example, if someone from the local school board is involved at the onset, then they may propose and lead a community sustainability educational program. In this sense, the members of the CAG are key to implementing the plan in addition to writing it.
- **Expertise and Networks:** There is a wealth of knowledge in each community and the CAG allows the community to take advantage of this expertise. In addition, CAG members will also have access to networks of people, likely from outside the community, who can bring resources to the initiative. For example, a community group may have experience in writing proposals for sustainability initiatives, or be aware of funding agencies that could provide resources to the initiatives.
- **“Pulse” of the Community:** The CAG can be thought of as a resource to gauge how the community feels on issues, for example by having the CAG review key documents before they are released to the public at large. This will save time and hassle if sensitive issues can be identified and addressed before releasing documents too broadly. In addition, the CAG can also help garner the support of different sectors. For example, if a well respected business leader is involved, then this person can be used to bring on support of the business community.

About Citizens Advisory Group Composition

In addition to Council members and municipal staff, the CAG should consist of other individuals who are well respected in the community, who can act as champions for the process, and who municipal staff can go to for advice on issues that may arise throughout the planning process.

In forming the CAG, consider the following questions:

- Can we find representatives from all five dimensions/pillars of sustainability?
- What are the major businesses / sectors in my community?
- What other major actors are there in my community, e.g. school?

¹⁴ Although many communities have used a CAG to provide guidance in the planning process, not all communities may want to use a Citizens Advisory Group. *Tool C: Guidance on Citizen Advisory Groups* provides guidance on whether a CAG is right for your community.

- What non-governmental organizations should be involved, e.g. a local environmental, cultural or social services group?
- Who are the biggest potential opponents of sustainability planning?

One planning guide author offers the following advice to identify community leaders:

...think of some character traits that you will want in your core team: people who are energetic, intelligent, upbeat — in short, people who are driven to see a vision implemented despite any barriers. Think of people you always seem to see at local events, who make you wonder where they find the time to always be involved.¹⁵

There is no single best way to form a CAG, and municipalities of different sizes will form these groups differently.¹⁶ Many communities prefer to keep their CAG somewhere between 8 to 12 people; of course, this may vary depending on the size of your community.¹⁷

The CAG will be a resource throughout the process, and will be particularly useful during three parts of the planning process:

- 1) Synthesizing community input on a vision using the five dimensions/pillars of sustainability, and adopting principles of sustainability (see Phase II);
- 2) Identifying Issue Areas that need to be addressed in order to achieve the vision (see Phase III); and
- 3) Identifying people to form task forces around the issue areas to develop recommended strategies (see Phase III).

5. Plan the Planning Process

The Process Leader and Process Manager should consider the rest of this Guidebook and determine:

- how the main steps in the rest of this document can be accomplished;
- who will be responsible for each step; and
- what are realistic timelines?

This should be summarized into a schedule of task, meetings and milestones that includes a budget, responsibilities and timelines. When putting together the schedule, consider speaking with other communities who either have completed a plan or are engaged with one to learn from their experience. At this point, it may be useful to perform a scan of existing plans in a community to determine how they support the process. *Tool E: Integrating Existing Planning Processes* provides information on

¹⁵ Halsmith, G. et al. (2005) p. 21

¹⁶ To form the CAG, a municipality may want to perform a stakeholder analysis to determine those people who should be on the CAG. More information on how to perform a stakeholder analysis is provided in *Tool D: Notes on a Stakeholder Analysis Workshop*.

¹⁷ *Tool H: imagineCalgary's Vision Process and Tool I: Town of Canmore's Visioning Process* provides examples of community advisory groups in the City of Calgary and the Town of Canmore.

integrating existing planning processes with the MSP. One author offers the following advice on developing a schedule:

Laying out what is to be done, by whom, and when, means making a real plan, and deserves the same care as the next cycle of planning will be given. Participation in this “planning for planning” should be as broad as possible. Real alternatives should be weighed, and contingencies should be considered. Real commitments are critical: there should be a written outline of the program design, explicitly assigning roles and establishing mileposts along the way, agreed to by all participating parties. Planning is notoriously easy to extend. Realistic but respected time targets are a critical part of program design.¹⁸

Once the schedule is drafted it can be reviewed by the CAG, and then approved by Council.

¹⁸ Herr, P. (1995). p. 17



Phase II: Creating a Shared Understanding of Sustainable Community Success

“Leaders establish the vision for the future and set the strategy for getting there; they cause change. They motivate and inspire others to go in the right direction and they, along with everyone else, sacrifice to get there.”

- John Kotter, Author

Introduction

Being strategic requires having a clear understanding of success, of where one wants to be. This is the essence of a backcasting approach¹⁹. Many communities use the concept of a “vision statement” to define success for their communities. There is no single best way to develop a vision; however, a visioning process should essentially clarify the *values* of the community, what *characteristics* they want their community to have in the future, and the ways the people see to *improve* the community. This phase will share some of the key steps in creating a vision and show examples of how communities are developing their visions.

Desired Outcome

The output of the visioning process is a statement of the community’s values and the identification of some strategic issue areas to develop actions plans to move towards the community’s vision. A successful community vision should be “felt in the heart and understood in the mind”.

¹⁹ For more information on Backcasting see *Tool A*.

Suggested Process Steps

The following table provides some suggested steps in this phase of the process.

1) Structuring the Planning Process		
2) Creating a Shared Understanding of Sustainable Community Success		
Step:	Deliverable:	Tools / Worksheets:
1. Adopt Sustainability Principles	Council resolution with adoption of Sustainability Principles	Tool F: Backcasting Tool G: Council Resolution
2. Gather Community Input on Vision	Input on values and vision from community	Tool H: imagineCalgary's Visioning Process. Tool I: Canmore's Visioning Process
3. Decide on Scope of Vision	Decision on degree of public input	Tool H: imagineCalgary's Visioning Process. Tool I: Canmore's Visioning Process
4. Synthesize Community Input into Vision Statement	Vision statement	Tool I: Canmore's Visioning Process Tool J: Writing Vision Statements Tool K: Sample Vision Statements
5. Communicate and Celebrate the vision	A celebration event(s)	
3) Determining and Analyzing Issues to Community Success		
4) Action Planning		
5) Ongoing Integration and Implementation		

1. Adopt Sustainability Principles

When it comes to sustainability, it is not enough to identify an attractive and pleasant community vision. The envisioned future must also be sustainable, taking into account the five pillars of sustainability.

Many communities and organizations worldwide have adopted the sustainability principles developed by The Natural Step as a guide for decision making²⁰. These principles are designed to be used for backcasting and are considered universal,

²⁰ James, S. & Lahti, T. (2004). pp.6-8. Many references in peer-reviewed scientific journals are also available, but have not been included in this document.



because they are the result of over 20 years of scientific research and academic scrutiny to define sustainability. The principles read:

In a sustainable society,

1) people are not subject to conditions that undermine their ability to meet their basic human needs

2) And nature is not subject to systematically increasing:

... concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust

... concentrations of substances produced by society

... degradation by physical means.²¹

For an example of a council resolution to adopt these principles see *Tool G: Example of Council Resolution*.

Since these principles are very precise and scientific in their language, due to their academic roots, they may not be straightforward to a community. Since they can be difficult to grasp initially, they may be met with some skepticism or resistance. The experience of communities using these principles is that this can be overcome through education; most people find that the principles are actually fairly simple to grasp with a little bit of time spent understanding the science that underpins them and examples of their application. Therefore it is recommended that the introduction of these principles be accompanied with an educational component such as a workshop. For example, the Town of Canmore held a series of workshops with businesses, elected officials, and municipal staff on these principles and how they apply to their community.²²

It is important to note that while the sustainability principles represent long-term conditions that must be met for society to be sustainable, they should not be confused with a vision and are not meant to replace the five dimensions/pillars of sustainability that are essential to a community's vision. Rather, the principles help communities ask good questions *about their vision* to ensure that they are moving towards a future where the conditions of sustainability are met.

For this reason, both the sustainability principles AND the five dimensions of sustainability that make up the community's vision are used to scrutinize potential actions and strategies. Within this context, the end goal is a sustainable community with a strong economy, a vibrant cultural scene, a strong social network, a healthy environment, and good governance (i.e. the five dimensions of sustainability). If a municipality finds that it does not have the resources to provide the necessary education to overcome confusion about the sustainability principles, it may wish to more strongly emphasize the vision and the five dimensions/pillars in later phases.

At certain times that are relevant, the rest of this document will discuss these principles as a way to ensure the MSP is leading the community towards sustainability.

²¹ These principles are commonly associated with the international not-for-profit organization that has coordinated their development in the scientific community, The Natural Step. More information on the principles can be found in *Tool F: Backcasting from Sustainability Principles*.

²² For more information on these principles and educational resources, please see the webpage of The Natural Step Canada at www.naturalstep.ca

2. Decide on Scope of Visioning Process

The prospect of embarking on a community visioning process may seem daunting for some. It is important to scope the visioning process within the resource constraints of the municipality. Fortunately, it is entirely feasible to do so. While the next sections describe the steps in a full visioning process, different approaches and levels of engagement are possible in this phase.

For example, some communities may already have a vision statement, core values and some form of strategic goals. If this is the case for your municipality, then this phase of the MSP process might simply involve adopting the sustainability principles and reviewing your current vision against the intent of the type of vision being described in this section.

For those communities who do not wish to undertake the development of a vision at this time, it is possible as an alternative to backcast directly from the sustainability principles described above. In this case, the broad community visioning process might be delayed for later. Municipalities wishing to take this course would then simply adopt the sustainability principles in this phase and ensure that the planning effort in the next phases consider strategy areas that address all five dimensions of sustainability.

Even if the visioning steps described below are followed, varying degrees of community engagement are possible. Council could choose, for example, to develop the vision themselves and/or with the input of the Citizens Advisory Group, then hold a public meeting or other means to gather community input, and then have Council formally adopt the vision. Whatever the level of engagement, because a vision is representative of the community it is important for the whole community to have an opportunity to either help develop the vision or to provide feedback on it so that there is the best chance for agreement and ownership throughout.

3. Gather Community Input on Vision

“Cherish your visions and your dreams as they are the children of your soul; the blueprints of your ultimate achievements.”

- Napoleon Hill, Author (1883-1970)

People are generally neither inspired nor motivated by principles, they are inspired and motivated by their hopes and dreams. The first step of the visioning process is to gather from citizens their thoughts on their hopes and dreams, or more specifically on:

- the *values* of the community
- what they would like to *change*,
- what *characteristics* they would ultimately like to see in their community
- what *assets* the community has to support that change
- what they can do to *help*

When gathering input it is useful to keep in mind that different people will want to be involved in different ways. There are three main levels of engagement to keep in mind:

- 1) First, there are the people in the community who are the most keen to be involved in a visioning process and will be willing to spend a lot of time in helping gather input, providing their own input and helping to synthesize input from others into a vision statement. These are people that may already be part of the Citizens Advisory Group. For people with this level of energy, it is useful to engage them in deep dialogues on where they see the community going. For example, consider inviting them onto a Citizens Advisory Group or creating a special advisory group on the visioning process specifically.
- 2) Secondly, there are people in the community who are interested in discussing the future of their community; however, they are not willing or able to commit great amounts of time. For example, these people may come out to an evening event for an hour to give their input, however, this will likely be their total commitment. For these people, it is useful to consider other ways to engage them. For example, consider designing one or two hour evening workshops or dialogues that these people can attend to provide input or having “neighbourhood cafes” that are facilitated dialogues asking relevant questions about the future of their community.
- 3) Thirdly, there are people in the community who only have a passing interest in the visioning process, and will likely not proactively involve themselves. For these people, it is useful to come up with quick ways to gather their input. For example, these can consist of a survey on a website, or a street survey where people on the street are asked a select number of questions. As the Guidebook & Tools are going to be “expandable”, a sample/model survey will be developed for municipalities to use to gather information from those people who do not have a keen commitment to sustainability planning, yet would appreciate an opportunity to provide some input to the process.

It is useful in advance to consider ways to involve the above three types of people into the process. There is no shortage of innovative ways to engage people in the dialogue. For some examples, see the case studies *in Tools H and I* that describe the visioning processes in the City of Calgary and the Town of Canmore.

4. Synthesize Input into a Vision Statement

Once input from the community has been gathered, there will need to be a step where the information is synthesized into a vision statement. There is no obvious way to do this, and it will involve drafts and revisions. It will likely require the Process Leader and municipal staff to do a first round of synthesis that will then be given to Council and citizens or the CAG for review, and to Council for approval.

While the vision may take many forms and should be unique to the community, the following elements are recommended for inclusion in a vision statement:

- *High-level Vision Statement* - This is, in effect, a very broad all encompassing statement of what the community is all about. It should be inspiring or challenging and seen as worthwhile. It also needs to be capable of being clearly articulated in very few words and sufficiently tangible and quantifiable.
- *Statement of Core Values* - A community's core values are akin to its personality—not just what it does, but what it is and what it values as being important. The core values, therefore, essentially represent the community's culture.

- *High-level Goals for the five Dimensions of Sustainability* - The purpose of the sustainability dimension goals is to describe where the community aims to be with respect to its social, cultural, environmental, economic, and governance aspects. They essentially define what success will look like.

These goals should have a clear future perspective (i.e. they should point to the key factors that define a successful community in the future). They should be engaging and present motivating challenges. These goals can be formulated at a high level, clear enough to use as guides in planning, but there is no specific need for them to be quantifiable. In general, there is no need to have more than 10 -12 goals (i.e. no more than 2-3 for each sustainability dimension). If there are more, they may be unnecessarily overlapping and should be condensed.

Sustainability dimension goals are the one aspect of the vision that might change over time as progress is made toward reaching the vision, and as other variables change in the community. As such, the community may have to make adjustments in the way it progresses. [See *Tool L* for examples of sustainability dimension goals.]

At this point, the community should also scrutinize the vision through the lens of the sustainability principles mentioned above by asking whether the vision will lead to a community where these principles are violated. There may need to be an educational component on these principles for those working on synthesizing the community's input into a vision statement. See *Tool I*, for how the Town of Canmore is considering reviewing their vision using the sustainability principles.

See *Tool J: Writing Vision Statements* for further guidance on drafting a vision statement and *Tool K: Sample Vision Statements* for sample vision statements.

5. Communicate and Celebrate the Vision

Once the vision statement is ready to be made public, organize a community event to celebrate the vision with the community. If Council has decided to form a CAG, its members should play a prominent role in such an event to help create buy-in into the vision. The Process Leader, municipality, and CAG should also consider other ideas for communicating the vision with the public.

Never underestimate the power of a “sense of community”, i.e. the relationships that create the foundation for community trust and happiness. The most brilliant sustainability plan will fail if the community is not behind it or is too fragmented to collaborate in its implementation. Simple activities - such as concerts or pancake breakfasts – can go a long way in building a sense of community. If the Municipality is resource-constrained, the celebration of the vision could be piggy-backed onto an annual community event.

Once the community's vision has been established and there is a good understanding of the sustainability principles, then the community can move onto the next phase that deals with identifying strategy areas to achieving the vision.

Phase III: Determine and Analyze Strategy Areas for Success

"Leadership in a learning organization starts with the principle of creative tension. Creative tension comes from seeing clearly where we want to be, our "vision," and telling the truth about where we are, our "current reality." The gap between the two generates a natural tension."

- Peter Senge, Author

Introduction

Creating the "gap" in people's minds will help to stimulate creativity to identify initiatives and investments to bridge the gap.²³ This phase involves identifying strategy areas that must be addressed to achieve the vision and developing a "descriptions of success" (i.e. how that strategy would look like if the vision was achieved) and a "description of current reality" (i.e. how that strategy looks today) for each issue. "Water" or "Arts and Culture" are examples of potential strategy areas, i.e. they are the areas the community must address to achieve its vision.

In this phase, Council may choose to form task forces around each strategy area made up of experts representing partner organizations. As with the Citizens Advisory Group, the task forces are an opportunity to access additional expertise, influence, and resources for implementation.

Since communities are dealing with more than one strategy area, one of the key challenges of this step is how to ensure both comprehensiveness *and* integration. A *comprehensive* approach to sustainable community planning requires that *all areas* of a community be considered. An *integrated* approach to sustainable community planning requires that these various *areas not be considered in isolation from each other*. The key to achieving both comprehensiveness and integration is for the task forces in different strategy areas to use the same framework and process.

Desired Outcome

This phase in the planning process focuses on developing **clear descriptions of success and current reality in each strategy area** key to achieving the community's vision, along with a set of success indicators for each strategy area. This will set the stage for action planning and prioritization, which is described in the next phase.



²³ The best way to ensure that this creative tension is maintained is to use the sustainability principles, including a full consideration of all five dimensions/pillars of sustainability, to frame both steps. The sustainability principles ensure that the description of success falls within the constraints of a sustainable future, and they ensure that the assessment of current reality is rigorous and complete. For further elaboration information, see *Tool F*.

Suggested Process Steps

The following table provides some suggested steps in this phase of the process.

1) Structuring the Planning Process		
2) Creating a Shared Understanding of Sustainable Community Success		
3) Determining and Analyzing Strategy Areas for Community Success		
Step:	Deliverable:	Tools / Worksheets:
1. Identify Strategy Areas	List of priority Strategy Areas	Tool M: Facilitator's Notes to Identify Strategy Areas
2. Form Strategy Area Task Forces	Task Forces formed	Tool B: Participant Engagement Lessons Tool N: Facilitator's Notes for Task Force Sessions
3. Train on Vision and Community Sustainability	Task Force members understand vision and sustainability	
4. Develop Descriptions of Success for Strategy Areas	Descriptions of Success for Strategy areas Inventory of community assets	Tool N: Facilitator's Notes for Task Force Sessions Tool O: Lessons on Descriptions of Success Tool P: Descriptions of Success Worksheets Tool Q : Worksheet to Identify Assets
5. Identify Strategy Area-specific Indicators	Indicators for Strategy Areas	Tool R: Resources for Indicators
6. Develop Descriptions of Current Reality for Strategy Areas	Descriptions of Current Reality for Strategy Areas	Tool N: Facilitator's Notes for Task Force Sessions Tool S: Lessons on Descriptions of Current Reality Tool T: Descriptions of Current Reality
4) Action Planning		
5) Ongoing Integration and Implementation		

1. Identify Strategy Areas

The first step is to determine which strategy areas need to be addressed in order to achieve the community's vision. The determination of which strategy areas to address will be specific to each community, depending on local issues, needs, assets, resources, values and on the community's vision. It will also likely be an iterative process, in that

new strategy areas or new groupings for strategy areas may emerge as the work progresses.

The Process Leader should engage both Council and the Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) in making the determination of which strategy areas are most relevant for the community. A sample agenda of a meeting to do this is provided in *Tool M: Facilitator's Notes to Identify Strategy Areas*.

A list of 14 potential strategy areas is provided below. Each of these strategy areas touches on all 5 dimensions of sustainability outlined earlier (i.e. social, economic, environmental, cultural, governance). Since an MSP should be as comprehensive as possible, ideally all or most of these strategy areas should be addressed. However, recognizing the reality that resources are limited, the CAG and Council can help select the most relevant and pressing for the community.

These are just suggestions, and these strategy areas can be regrouped and/or additional strategy areas may be identified. The benefit of not grouping them, i.e. keeping them more precise and distinct, is that it gives a clearer scope for the discussion and analysis. In any case, there is no single best way to do this and the approach is flexible - the final decision on strategy areas is up to each community.

Table 2: Potential Strategy Areas

Issue Area	Description
Affordability & Housing	How to make living and playing in your community affordable for residents, and how to meet housing needs of diverse permanent residents.
Arts/Culture/Heritage	How arts, culture and heritage will be supported, enhanced and delivered, and how they will stimulate and support the transition to sustainability in your community.
Built Environment	How to develop and renew buildings, neighbourhoods and facilities that will contribute to making your community unique, live-able and sustainable.
Economic Development	How your community will create a strong local economy and develop and maintain successful, resilient businesses that help move the community toward sustainability.
Energy	How to meet your community's energy needs in an efficient, affordable, sustainable and reliable way, while managing greenhouse gas emissions and air quality.
Food	How to ensure a healthy, nutritious and sustainable food supply that maximizes opportunities to build the social, ecological, cultural and economic capital of the community.
Governance & Partnerships	How local government and other stakeholders will organize and collaborate in decision-making and implementation of the MSP.
Health and Social	How to meet the health and social needs (including physical, mental, spiritual and emotional) of the community.
Learning	How to meet resident and visitor needs for formal and informal



	lifelong learning.
Materials and Solid Waste	How to meet your community's need for material supply and disposal through the most efficient use and reuse of the most sustainable materials and keeping waste out of the natural environment.
Natural Areas	How ecosystem integrity and biodiversity will be protected and where possible restored in your community/region.
Recreation & Leisure	How recreation and leisure activities for both residents and visitors will be delivered to exceed expectations while protecting the environment.
Transportation	How to move residents, employees, visitors, and materials to, from and within the community in a more sustainable manner.
Water	How to provide a dependable supply of high quality water in a way that maintains healthy aquatic environments and uses water efficiently.

2. Form Task Forces around Strategy Areas

Involving local community partners in the strategy area analysis ensures that the plan responds to the needs, concerns and preferences of local citizens and benefits from the knowledge and resources of local residents and institutions. Task forces are a good way to engage community members meaningfully.

In some communities where there are a limited number of interested citizens, therefore the “task forces” may instead be made up of the same people who form Council or the Citizens Advisory Group (CAG). However, if possible, a broader composition is preferable, because, similar to the CAG, the task forces provide an opportunity to take advantage of the community's:

- **Resources for Implementation.** Later on in the process, once the plan is written and the community moves into the implementation stage, these organizations will likely also play an important role to implement the certain initiatives and investments. Involving stakeholders from the onset ensures that they will be on board when it comes time to implement the plan and that the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the community have been properly addressed. For example, if someone from the local school board is involved at the onset, then they may propose and lead a community sustainability educational program. In this sense, the members of the task forces are key to implementing the plan in addition to writing it.
- **Expertise and Networks:** There is a wealth of knowledge in each community, and task forces allow the community to take advantage of this expertise. In addition, task force members will also have access to networks of people, likely from outside the community, who can bring resources to the initiative. For example, a community group may have experience in writing proposals, or be aware of funding agencies that could provide resources to the initiatives.

The rest of this document uses “task forces” to refer to any group that is looking at different strategy areas in the community, whether they are newly formed groups, sub-



committees of Council, or existing groups that can be “tapped” into for input to the process.

About Task Force Composition

Community members – both supporters and critics - should be invited to join task forces where they have a particular expertise and/or resources to support implementation. A manageable size for each task force would be between 3 to 8 people.²⁴

The task forces should be composed of key community stakeholders relevant to the strategy area, such as councilors, municipal staff, large employers, citizens groups, non-profit organizations, first nations, and other representative groups in the community (e.g. seniors, youth, etc).

When selecting partners consider the following questions:

- *“Who are the experts in the strategy area in my community?”* – In every community, there are people who have an interest and expertise on a particular subject area. For example, for arts and culture this person may be the head of a cultural association or a respected local artist. Bringing these people into the dialogue will help the community tap into their knowledge, resources and network.
- *“Which organizations might have the capacity and resources to implement actions that will arise out of the task force?”* – Once actions are identified, it will not be the sole responsibility of the municipality to implement the actions; rather, it will be the responsibility of the entire community. When selecting task force members, keep in mind local organizations that have the capacity and resources to lead initiatives. For example, the task force may conceive of an education program with students working with their parents on how to conserve water. In this case, it could be the school that takes the lead on the initiative, and the municipality or other organizations that play support roles. When inviting partner organizations onto the task force, consider having them sign a formal agreement that they will contribute certain resources to support the implementation of actions.

²⁴ As many people may want to participate, consider how to handle the possibility of their being more interest in particular task forces than what makes for an appropriate and manageable size. One option could be to have an additional consultation step where the task force consults with a broader group of citizens interested in their issue area.

Consider the example below of possible members for a Task Force for Arts and Culture:

- municipal official	- someone from arts council
- someone from a First Nations community	- someone from tourism authority
- local artist	- someone from organizing committee of an annual festival
- school	- someone from the local museum
- Chamber of Commerce representative	- small businesses
- Representative of major/large business	- someone from the IT industry
	- a community member employed by the provincial/territorial or federal government

Clarify Task Force Process and Deliverables

Task force members should commit to participating fully in a process to develop the necessary deliverables for their group, respecting both the importance of this work and the time constraints of the task force members. They should be clear on the time commitment, both during and outside task force meetings (e.g. pre-reading), and the deliverables of the task force, which should include:

- 1) A description of success on the strategy area aligned with the community's vision
- 2) A set of proposed indicators to measure progress on the strategy area
- 3) A "description of the current reality" of the strategy area in the community
- 4) A set of proposed prioritized actions to bridge current reality with the success.

A set of facilitator's notes / agendas for a set of task force meetings to achieve the above deliverables are provided in *Tool N: Facilitator's Notes for Task Force Sessions*.

Please see *Tool B* for lessons on participant engagement. These lessons are relevant to review again when considering how to engage the task force members.

3. Train on Community Vision and Sustainability

To work effectively as a group, task force members should have a clear understanding of where their work fits into the broader community planning process. As much time as possible should be invested at the outset to ensure that task force members have a shared understanding of the community's vision, of the planning process as a whole, and of the sustainability principles. For example, the first session with each Task Force may simply be to train people in the topic of sustainability, to have a discussion on the community's vision, and to clarify the process for the task forces.

4. Develop Descriptions of Success in Strategy Areas

Task force members should develop a Description of Success (DoS)²⁵ for their strategy area that is relevant to the community. The DoS describes what **success** in this

²⁵ At this point, there may be some confusion around the "Vision" and the "Description of Success". The "Vision" is the overarching statement of success for the entire community,



strategy area will look like with respect to the community's vision. The DoS should also include existing community **assets** such as existing plans and programs already implemented to move your community toward sustainability²⁶.

- 1) The Process Leader or Process Manager should first prepare a draft DoS for the strategy areas for the task force to review. When preparing the draft, the key questions to ask are “*what should the strategy area look like if the vision was achieved?*” and “*what assets does the community have to reach this description?*” Sample DoSs for some strategy areas are provided in *Tool P: Descriptions of Success Worksheets*.
- 2) The task force should then review the draft relevant to its strategy area and edit it as appropriate so that they are aligned with the community's vision and the sustainability principles. A suggested agenda for a task force workshop to develop the DoS is provided in *Tool N*.

Lessons learned from practitioners who have developed Descriptions of Success can be found in *Tool O: Lessons on Descriptions of Success*.

5. Identify Potential Strategy Area-specific Targets and Indicators

Once the task force has finalized the Description of Success (DoS) for its strategy area, it should use this description to identify a set of indicators and targets that the community can use to monitor progress toward success in that strategy area. What things can be measured and monitored to inform the community whether it is making progress toward the DoS? Often the most relevant indicators for a given strategy area will become relevant through the task force's work on developing the DoS. The task force should look for key areas of the DoS, taking into consideration what is quantifiable, what data sources are readily available, what other communities have tracked in this area, etc. Ideally, there should be a set of 3-5 indicators maximum for each strategy area.

Gathering data to track progress on indicators can be a very onerous task. The degree to which communities wish to track progress will vary. Consider the following questions when selecting indicators:

- 1) “*What indicators may already be tracked by the provincial or federal government?*” – The Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada collect data and track progress on a wide variety of community elements. Sometimes existing indicators and their accompanying datasets will be the most logical indicators to adapt to your situation.
- 2) “*What indicators already exist that the community tracks?*” – Ideally the indicators used can be those that already exist. In preparing for this task force meeting it

whereas the “Description of Success” is focused on the issue area and uses the “Vision” as a guide. An issue-specific Description of Success is more tangible context to help the community brainstorm and prioritize action. Although the strategy areas are discussed in separate task forces, they are still considered in an integrated manner because all task forces are guided by the common Vision.

²⁶ Although a discussion of assets could be saved until the discussion on current reality later on in the process, the value of creating a list of assets here is to create a positive feeling of all the community already has early on. This will serve to energize people involved in the process.

will be useful to provide task force members with a list of already-tracked indicators.

- 3) “Are there organizations within the community who can help track information?” – there are often organizations in a community, such as a local non-profit organization, that can apply for funding to develop a project to track community sustainability. Inviting these types of organizations onto the task force helps gain their support in gathering information for indicators.

In determining indicators try to make clear links with the Description of Success; for example, a community identifies their goals (e.g. diversification of the economy), sets time-limited targets related to its goals and indicators (e.g. a 10 percent increase in the number of businesses by 2010) and establishes acceptable indicators (e.g. number of businesses), and then collect, monitor and report on the data. The targets and indicators do not have to be finalized at this point, later on in the Action Planning phase the task force should review the targets and indicators. Resources for the development of indicators can be found in *Tool R: Resources for Indicators*. Monitoring and evaluation are discussed in *Phase V: Ongoing Implementation and Monitoring*.

6. Develop Descriptions of Current Reality in Strategy Areas

The Description of Current Reality (DoCR) describes today’s situation in the strategy area and highlights the **key challenges** to achieve the Description of Success. Understanding these challenges provides a starting point for identifying actions to move forward.

1. The Process Leader or Process Manager should prepare as much background information as possible to inform the task force. For example, data on demographics²⁷, existing policies, land-use, technical reports, energy, material and facilities usage, etc. can help the task force better understand current reality in the strategy area. There are likely experts in the community that have access to information sources on particular topics, and this is an excellent opportunity to draw on their expertise. This whole process has the added benefit of helping the group identify what it doesn’t know and therefore what additional information it may require. Lessons learned from practitioners in developing descriptions of current reality can be found in *Tool S: Lessons on Descriptions of Current Reality*.
2. Since everyone’s time is valuable, it is important to respect people’s time demands as much as possible. The Process Leader or Process Manager should prepare a summary of available information ahead of time. Examples of summaries for some strategy areas are provided in *Tool T: Descriptions of Current Reality*. The Process Leader can use these samples to develop similar summaries for each of the strategy areas. Each task force can use these summaries to develop a more complete DoCR for the strategy area.

²⁷ For information on demographics see: Statistics Canada. (2001). *2001 Community Profiles*. [Online] Available: <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/CP01/Index.cfm?Lang=E>. (December 26, 2005) and Alberta Municipal Affairs. (2005). *Municipal Profiles*. [Online] Available: <http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/cfml/profiles/index.cfm>. (December 26, 2005)



3. Task forces should then review the summary and edit it as appropriate so that it provides a good summary of current reality. A suggested agenda for a task force workshop to develop the DoS is provided in *Tool N*.

Once the task force has created a Description of Success and Description of Current Reality for their strategy area, then it is ready to move on to the Action Planning phase.



Phase IV: Action Planning

“The best way to get a good idea is to get a lot of ideas.”

– Linus Pauling, world-renown scientist and humanitarian

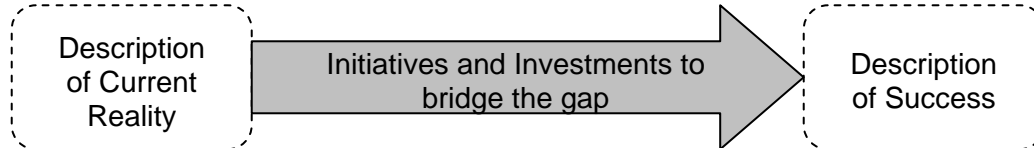
Introduction

The process of developing description of *success* and of analyzing the *current reality* in strategy areas in your community will have generated a number of ideas for initiatives and investments. Action planning is the phase where the community can dive into them and explore others with great enthusiasm.

This phase involves engaging the task forces in the generation of ideas for initiatives and investments to move the community from current reality toward success, sorting those ideas into short-term, medium-term and long-term priorities. The key to this phase is developing an investment screening process to identify those that a) move the community toward success b) move the community towards sustainability, c) are stepping stones to future improvements, rather than dead-end investments, and d) generate an adequate economic and political return on investment to seed future moves.

Desired Outcome

The output of the Action Planning phase is a list of initiatives and investments that have been sorted into immediate, medium-term and long-term priorities to be integrated into business plans and budgets of the municipality and its partners in the MSP.



Suggested Process Steps

The following table provides some suggested steps in this phase of the process.

1) Structuring the Planning Process		
2) Creating a Shared Understanding of Sustainable Community Success		
3) Determining and Analyzing Strategy Areas for Community Success		
4) Action Planning		
Step:	Deliverable:	Tools / Worksheets:
1. Generate Ideas for Initiatives and Investments	List of possible initiatives and investments for the strategy area	Tool U: Sources for Innovative Actions
2. Prioritize Actions Using Strategic Questions	List of immediate actions, medium-term, and long-term initiatives	Tool N: Facilitator's Notes for Task Force Sessions Tool V: Guidance on Prioritization Tool W: Prioritization Matrix
3. Assign Responsibility for Implementation	Responsible organizations linked to actions	Tool X: Summarize Strategy Area Actions
4. Compile Plans and Identify High Leverage Actions	Plan and List of high leverage actions that appear in multiple task forces	
5) Ongoing Integration and Implementation		

1. Generate Ideas for Initiatives and Investments

Having developed a compelling Description of Success and of Current Reality in each strategy area, the next important step is for each task force to generate a list of potential initiatives the community could take in order to bridge the gap.

The point of this exercise is to generate as many innovative initiatives as possible, both large and small, so allow for creativity and fun. Remember this is a brainstorming exercise, so allow for “wild ideas” that today have *economic* challenges (e.g. solar energy being too expensive) or *technical* challenges (e.g. lack of refuelling infrastructure for hydrogen fuel cells), because in the *future* these challenges may have been overcome. The reason to include these “wild ideas” is because the community may want to make short-term investments that set the stage to allow these “wild ideas” to happen if conditions change, e.g. setting aside land (short-term) and forming a partnership with a local art and cultural authority (short-term) to build a solar-powered regional centre for the arts (long-term) when building materials drop in price and political momentum is built around the idea.

A few suggestions:

- Solicit input from a wide variety of colleagues, experts, and peers. Council may even consider organizing a forum to invite experts on the topic and solicit innovative ideas from a broad range of people. Be sure to allow enough time in this step of the process for research and creative brainstorming - i.e. it's not likely that all the good ideas will arise in a single meeting.
- While there is ample room for local creativity and flexibility in this step, there is also no need to recreate the wheel. Seek out examples of innovative initiatives from other communities that might be relevant to your community. *Tool U: Sources for Innovative Actions* contains a number of sources to find innovative actions that other communities have undertaken.

2. Prioritize Initiatives and Investments Based on Strategic Questions

The ideas generated in the previous step must now be prioritized into a plan to move the community step by step towards success and sustainability. The following four strategic questions form the basis for prioritizing investments and initiatives:

Does this initiative or investment:

- 1) ...move us towards our community's definition of success?
- 2) ...move us towards the sustainability principles?
- 3) ...provide flexibility for future community leaders to take action?
- 4) ...generate sufficient economic and political return to seed future investments?

A proposed initiative that answers "yes" to these questions is one that is viable in the short-term, i.e. it is a "low hanging fruit", while setting the stage for future medium and longer-term initiatives. There may be additional questions that are relevant for screening actions, but *at least* these questions should be used to scrutinize actions.

These four strategic questions are described in more detail in *Tool V: Guidance on Prioritization*. An agenda for a task force meeting to prioritize actions and a worksheet to support this step can be found in *Tool N* and *Tool W* respectively.

If there is an idea that makes sense to everyone to start working on, then it is not necessary to wait until the end of the planning process to implement actions. In fact, it is better to implement some "low-hanging fruit" ideas as soon as possible to show progress early on. This will serve to energize the people who are working so hard in the planning process and demonstrate success to the broader community to gain their support.

3. Assign Responsibility for Implementation

Once actions have been identified, assign responsibility for implementation for the action to one of the task force members and the partner organizations they represent. The responsible organization does not need to be the municipality. For example, if a local school program is identified as a "low-hanging fruit" project, then the local school or school board could be the group that is responsible for implementing the project.

The task force should also revisit its proposed indicators and targets and revise them according to the proposed ideas and investments.

A worksheet to support this step can be found in *Tool X: Worksheet to Summarize Strategy Area Actions*

4. Compile Task Force Plans into Single Plan and Identify Common Actions across Issue Areas

Once the task forces have identified short-, medium-, and long-term initiatives in their individual strategy areas, the municipality, Process Leader and Process Manager should compile these into a single overarching plan for the community.

While doing this, the Process Leaders should consider whether common initiatives and investments arise in more than one strategy area, in particular, capital projects that will require that the municipality take a lead role. If an idea shows up as a priority initiative in more than one strategy area, then this may be a signal that it is a “high-leverage” opportunity to move the community towards sustainability, i.e. an investment that is able to support the progress of more than one strategy area.



Phase V: Ongoing Implementation and Monitoring

Introduction

Thus far, this Guidebook has focused on presenting a process for creating a Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP). However, one of the greatest challenges communities face is moving from *planning* to *implementation*.

Successful sustainability plans achieve concrete results and become part of the official policies and practices of the community. They move beyond planning that focuses primarily on the plan and instead focus on creating a process by which strategies can be developed, monitored and modified on an ongoing basis.

This section will provide advice and guidance on implementing and monitoring the plan. Resources and examples for this section can be found in *Tool Y: Resources for Ongoing Implementation and Monitoring*.

Monitor and Evaluate the Plan

There is a saying that “what gets measured tends to get done”. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation helps the community understand how close the community is to achieving what it laid out in the plan. Timely evaluation helps to identify problems and develop solutions that can save time, money and effort.

Periodic Reviews of the Plan

If a Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) or task forces have been formed, then one ongoing role for these groups could be to help with the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the plan. For example, periodic reviews with Council, the CAG, and / or the task forces can take place to review on the progress of the plan. During these meetings, partner organizations can report to the rest of the group on what has been accomplished, and what challenges they are facing. These periodic reviews can provide information to make changes in the plan, and to develop new ideas for implementation.

It is important to keep people involved, because implementation often fails due to a lack of stakeholder involvement beyond the planning stage as a result of burnout once the intensive planning process is complete, disinterest in implementation, or lack of meaningful mechanisms for continued involvement.

Report to the Community and Celebrate Successes

It will be important to celebrate successes as the community moves ahead with the plan. Celebrating successes and letting people know about progress will serve to energize the people who have worked so hard on the developing the plan and continue to build support.

Many communities have annual reports that focus on finances and major accomplishments. A sustainability report is a document that reports on progress towards achieving the sustainability goals adopted by the community. These reports range from simple documents that report on how which parts of the plan are being implemented, e.g. in a newsletter, to externally reviewed reports that present the annual change in indicators.

Ideally, these reports cover two areas:



- 1) The first is the progress the community is making on its plan, i.e. what actions have been implemented and what has not been. For example, by saying that 90 per cent of recommended actions for 2005 have been completed by partner organizations. It is very important to note successes to date.
- 2) The second is information on its selected indicators to measure progress on sustainability, for example average household income, air quality, etc.

In preparing these reports, it is important to focus on transparency and completeness (e.g. not leaving out unflattering details), and materiality (e.g. focusing on what is relevant for each strategy area). See *Tool Y* for examples of sustainability reports.

Ongoing Integration of Sustainability Concepts

Although, this phase may be considered the end of the process, in some ways it is also the beginning of discovering other ways in which a sustainability perspective can be integrated. Below are some suggestions for ongoing integration of sustainability concepts into the operations of the municipality and community.

Provide opportunities to staff and citizens to learn and keep involved

Staff members and community stakeholders can be provided educational opportunities and empowered to identify and act on sustainability solutions. Education programs include seminars on sustainability and workshops with stakeholders to solve a problem. Other ideas include creating a sustainability suggestion box; encouraging collaboration amongst different sectors; creating sustainability awards, competitions and incentives; creating 'fast-track' approval processes for sustainability suggestions; or incorporating sustainability goals into job descriptions and performance reviews.

As people are engaged, it is very likely that a few very keen and dedicated people will emerge as leaders. The community may also consider taking advantage of their enthusiasm and dedication by forming a "sustainability team". This group or individual could be responsible for identifying opportunities for collaboration between different sectors of the community, or if the municipality is large enough, between different departments. This group is most effective when it is a shared resource for the community (or a region) and has enough authority and resources to make things happen.

Additionally, as more people learn about sustainability, they may start considering initiatives that require the support of several community organizations, and / or, if the municipality is large enough, different departments. If not considered as a whole, these projects may cause conflict between organizations or departments. For example, some solutions (e.g. gardens designed to treat grey-water) may provide overall savings (e.g. reduced sewage infrastructure costs and increased water quality) yet have unevenly distributed costs and benefits (e.g. savings for infrastructure but increased maintenance costs for parks). Consider creating teams from different organizations and departments for decision-making to identify problems and solutions and reduce conflict with these types of projects.

Link Funding to Goals

Some municipalities require that proposals for internal and external funding include a section clearly outlining what impacts their actions will have on the community's sustainability goals and indicators. Some communities require potential recipients of



community funds to answer questions related to the prioritization questions during the budgeting process. For example, the municipality can ask that new significant investments be scrutinized using the following questions:

1. Does this project help move the community towards its vision?
 - a. If so, which of the strategy area Descriptions of Success does it support?
 - b. If not, which of the strategy area Descriptions of Success does it hinder?
2. Does this project help move the community towards compliance with the sustainability principles?
3. Does this idea provide future community leaders flexibility to take further steps towards the vision and sustainability?
 - a. If so, what further steps after this project can be taken to bring the community closer to its vision and sustainability?
4. Does this investment generate sufficient return to seed future investments?

Also consider, award programs (e.g. for the business or building with the greatest reduction in energy or water consumption), and grants for sustainable projects (e.g. watershed restoration) to encourage municipal staff and community members to consider innovative initiatives.

Similarly, local businesses, foundations and community groups could integrate these questions into their own internal decision-making.

Review Existing Policy Tools

Every community uses a variety of policy instruments to achieve their objectives. Existing tools should be reviewed to make them consistent with the community's sustainability plan. At times where relevant, new tools may be developed as well. The municipality may consider evaluating current policies to see if they support initiatives towards the community's sustainability vision.

When doing this, consider the following four categories: Regulations, Voluntary, Expenditure, and Financial Incentives²⁸.

Regulations: Regulations, or by-laws, are the most common policy instruments and include laws, licenses, permits, and other tools that have a legal basis. To be effective, by-laws must be enforced and have penalties associated with non-compliance. Examples include by-laws (e.g. mandating recycling or 'green' building codes), licenses and standards (e.g. hunting licences or best-available-technology standards), permits and tradable permits (e.g. carbon dioxide emission permits), and quid-pro-quo (e.g. requiring public amenities in exchange for property rezoning).

Voluntary: Voluntary instruments can be defined as mechanisms or actions that generally do not require regulations or financial incentives to change or influence behaviour. Examples include information and education programs (such as energy efficiency labelling or water advisories), the engagement of volunteers or volunteer associations (such as a Community Advisory Group or voluntary recycling program) and technical assistance (such as energy audits and waste reduction training programs).

²⁸ Roseland, M. (2005) *Toward Sustainable Communities*. (2005). pp. 31-40

Expenditure: Expenditure consists of any use of public money such as contracting, monitoring, investment, procurement and public-private partnerships. One overarching expenditure tool is community budgeting, where Council determines funding priorities for the year. Council can directly support the sustainability plan by investing in new technologies (e.g. recycling or composting facilities), adopting procurement strategies that reflect sustainability (e.g. for local manufacturers or recycled paper), developing monitoring programs (e.g. detecting water leaks or tracking indicators), creating new enterprises (e.g. non-profit Community Development Corporations or energy utilities), or engaging in public-private partnerships (e.g. Adopt-a-Park or community transit pass programs).

Financial incentives: Financial incentives influence the cost of specific activities in order to encourage or discourage them. Financial incentives are often used to incorporate social, environmental or cultural costs into the economic cost of an activity. Examples include pricing (e.g. water metering or parking costs), taxes and charges (e.g. real estate taxes or waste disposal fees), subsidies and tax incentives (e.g. reduced disposal fees for recyclables or property tax abatements for downtown development), grants and loans (e.g. revolving funds or performance grants), rebates and rewards (e.g. energy-efficient appliance rebates or environmental performance awards), and vouchers (e.g. coupons for purchasing compact fluorescent light bulbs).

Closing Comments

When implementing the plan it is useful to remember that the process is in many ways as important as the product itself: in other words, how the implementation strategy is developed is as important as what is done to put it in action. Participatory processes (such as the one described in this guide) that include community throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation stages will be far more successful than those that do not as a result of increased ownership, buy-in and trust.

Below are a few final comments to keep in mind as each community continues its sustainability journey²⁹:

- 1) **Find and engage community champions**, the ‘fire-souls’ who have a burning interest in community sustainability and who are willing to work passionately to facilitate and inform the process.
- 2) **Involve the implementers**, those community members and municipal officials who will actually be responsible for implementing the various changes, ranging from the staff person in charge of the photocopy room to the principal of the local school in charge of regional educational programs.
- 3) **Never underestimate the value of “a sense of community”**, i.e. the relationships that create the foundation for community trust and happiness. The most brilliant sustainability plan will fail if the community is not behind it or is too fragmented to collaborate in its implementation. Simple activities - such as concerts or pancake breakfasts – can go a long way in building community. In fact, public participation is itself a sustainable development strategy.

²⁹ These closing notes are drawn from *The Natural Step for Communities* (2004) by James and Lahti and *Toward Sustainable Communities* (2005) by Mark Roseland.



- 4) **Social equity is essential**, as inequities undermine a “sense of community”. Inequitable access to jobs, education and health care create social tension and reduce the economic, environmental, cultural and social potential of the community.
- 5) **Where the economic market works, use it and where it fails, don't be afraid to mandate changes.** The market is extremely effective at determining the prices consumers pay for goods and services but it is not so effective at aligning those prices with the true costs that communities pay in terms of pollution, waste disposal, congestion and diminished live-ability. Consequently, community leaders must be prepared to regulate those changes required for their sustainable development and the implementation of the community vision.
- 6) **Recognize that rules can be changed**, and community leaders can shift from ‘doing things as they've always done’ to finding different and innovative solutions that maximize the community vision and all five dimensions/pillars of sustainability.

Good Luck!



Tool A: Backcasting Elaborated

Adapted from: Cook, D. (2004). *The Natural Step: Towards a Sustainable Society*. Green Books: Foxhole. pp. 37 – 44.

Backcasting as a Planning Approach

“*Backcasting*” is a fancy term for something we are all familiar with. The term refers to the idea of planning from a future desirable outcome, followed by the question “what shall we do today to get there?”. It is something that we all do as individuals. For example, let’s say that a person wants to become a lawyer. This person holds this desirable outcome out as the starting point for her planning process. She then asks herself what do I need to do today to help me arrive at this desirable outcome. There may be a number of options for proceeding depending on her current situation (e.g. financial resources she has available, her father may be a lawyer so could help, etc.). Likely, it will involve a process of going to university, then to law school, then articling, and so on and so forth. It may require that she put her studies on hold for a while in order to work to save money for school, however, even this step is part of her overall strategy to arrive at success. This in a nutshell is an example of backcasting.

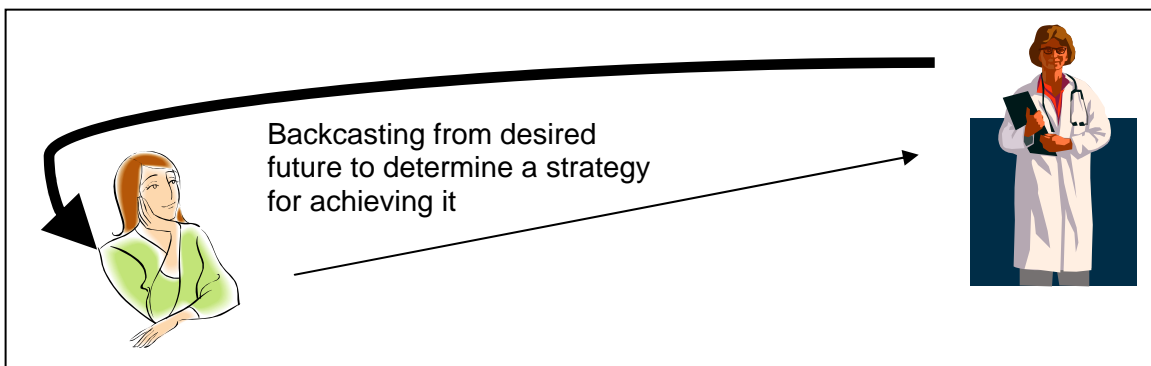


Figure 2: Backcasting where you start from a point of where you WANT to be, then looking at what is POSSIBLE to do, and creating a pathway forward. You are proactively taking control of your future and letting your vision determine the outcome.

Backcasting allows a community to consider its desired future and then take the steps to reach that outcome. This helps to overcome one of the main challenges with sustainability planning, which is how to reconcile the need to be *pragmatic* and also *idealistic*. Backcasting addresses this dichotomy by suggesting that we need to be idealistic in our goals (i.e. what we want in the future) AND pragmatic in the steps we take to get there (i.e. what we can do today).

Although it may be difficult to develop a shared understanding of success, the power of doing so is in how it can align the creativity, knowledge and skills of a community of people to achieve amazing results. For example, consider the story of the Apollo moon missions.

Shared Understanding of Success and Amazing Results

The Apollo project was based on the efforts of specialists and companies in fields such as materials technology, astronomy, IT systems, mathematics, technology, physiology, medical science, and politics. The crucial thing was that all these people had the same conception of what the project was about. There were no differences of opinion about the goal. It was about going to the moon. And the overall conditions that needed to be managed were also the same, i.e. the distance between the earth and the moon, the fact that the moon has no atmosphere, that the moon moves round the earth, that the moon's gravity is weaker, etc. In the end, after careful planning and training, the project group managed to put an electric car on the moon. No individual could learn all the essential elements of such a complicated project in his or her lifetime. Yet a team with a pronounced diversity of knowledge, skills, and values, accomplished it together.

In this example, no single person or small group of people could achieve the desired result. It was only through a process of developing a shared understanding of success and engaging a diverse set of people that they were able to achieve the results that they did.

The challenge with large groups, like organizations and communities, is that we generally do not backcast. Rather, we prefer to “forecast”. Meaning that we take past information to understand trends, and then project these trends out into the future. Plans are then based on trying to adapt to these trends. Backcasting can compliment forecasting and can bring the following benefits:

-Backcasting is useful when the problem that the planning initiative is trying to address is complex and if current trends are part of the problem. For example, consider strategic transportation planning. A common approach has been to examine current trends in a community, project the number of vehicles that will be on the road in the future and then plan the infrastructure to meet these projected future needs. However, in many cases increasing highway capacity actually accelerates the rate of increase in car usage; in other words, simply expanding capacity can trigger a positive feedback cycle and worsen the congestion and capacity problems it was meant to solve. In contrast, demand management strategies (DMS) involve setting a target for future demand and then backcasting from that desired outcome to the present in order to identify strategies to manage the trends driving demand (e.g. lack of alternatives; urban sprawl, etc.). The community may still need to expand the highway but it will include supporting initiatives (such as commuter or truck lanes or land-use changes) that may delay the projected need for the project and minimize future expansions (thereby saving money for other investments). In the case of planning towards sustainability, backcasting is a useful methodology because of the complexity of the sustainability

The Importance of a Shared Understanding of Success

In the book *Built to Last* two American economists scrutinized some of the world's leading companies in their fields. The companies that were studied had been pre-eminent in their respective market areas for many decades – ‘built to last.’ The study showed that charismatic managers were not the key ingredients for success. Nor did success depend on smart business ideas at the time of the founding of the companies. One factor emerged as a common denominator among the world's leading companies: all the people in the companies had the same idea of the ‘core values’ of the company i.e., a common basic understanding about what is important to one's company, the basic prerequisite for anyone wanting to put a team together.



challenge and the need to develop new ways of doing things in order to address these challenges.

-Backcasting also helps make sure we make the most effective use of our resources to achieve the desired outcome. Often times in a planning process, the participants focus immediately on actions and initiatives, without first having a clear understanding of the desired outcome. Not having a clear understanding of the desired outcome between the participants in a planning process at the outset may lead to number of initiatives and investments that appear disjointed and that may or may not contribute to the overall success of the community. For example, think about the last time your family moved to a new home. You probably first decided on some conditions for a successful home, i.e. what you want in a home? This could be a number of conditions that you agreed to with your family, i.e. close to schools, close to work, a certain number of bedrooms, and so on. After having a better idea of these principles of success, you then structured your resources to most effectively find this home. For example, you probably used the conditions as a screen to determine which homes to view. You probably did not just start viewing homes randomly hoping that you arrived at the home you wanted, as this would be not be an effective use of your time and energy. If we build on the traffic example from above, following trends indicates you should build a new highway. So that is your task: building a highway. But the real goal may be reducing congestion and providing convenient transportation systems. Backcasting from that goal allows the community to identify all the possibilities, which may include investing the money that was going to go into the short-term solution (the highway) into a long-term solution (public transportation infrastructure).

-Backcasting allows us to be both pragmatic and idealistic. The main premise of backcasting is to start your planning process with a desired future, and then asking what can we do today to reach that desired future. With respect to planning towards sustainability, it is about a desired future where the community is healthy and vibrant from a social, cultural, economical and environmental sense. The investments we make today should make sense economically today, while acting as stepping-stones towards that future. For example, many municipalities invest in energy efficiency measures as a first step, because they provide a financial return that can then be invested into subsequent investments. In addition, these investments should also allow the community to mitigate long term risks.

-Backcasting as a planning methodology is adaptive. Having an understanding of the desired outcome allows people to experiment with new initiatives and act as a reference to make corrections to ensure that the process is on track. Ray Anderson, the CEO of Interface, applies the process of backcasting to his organization and shares a good story to reinforce the importance of having a clear idea of the destination. He relates the story of the Apollo moon missions in the 1960s described earlier in this Tool. While on the way to the moon, the rockets were actually off-course 95% of the time, but were able to arrive to the moon through a series of mid-course corrections. These corrections could be made because the crew of the rocket had a very clear idea of their desired outcome. In this sense, backcasting allows communities to experiment with initiatives and reflect on their effectiveness in reaching the goal, making mid-course corrections along the way.

Tool B: Participant Engagement Lessons

The following outlines the experience of process leaders from the Resort Municipalities of Whistler's Award-winning comprehensive sustainability planning process, Whistler 2020. Although most Albertan communities are very different from Whistler, the experience of the people who led the process provides some insights into the challenges of a participative planning process and how to overcome these challenges.

About Whistler 2020

Whistler 2020 – Moving toward a Sustainable Future is Whistler's overarching, community-wide vision and strategic plan for continued success to the year 2020 – an ambitious step on our longer journey to a sustainable future. In terms of structure, Whistler 2020 is divided into two documents or "Volumes". Volume I describes what Whistler aspires to be in the year 2020, including the values, sustainability objectives, vision, priorities and directions that define success and sustainability for our resort community. Volume II outlines how Whistler will achieve the 2020 vision and includes sixteen strategies and related actions that move our community in the right direction, as well as indicators to measure our progress.

Whistler2020 is designed to help our resort community identify and act on opportunities to achieve long-term success in a complex and ever-changing environment. We recognize that the resort community must work hard to generate solutions that are appropriate for today and for the future. We also understand that Whistler requires the collective creativity and leadership of many organizations as well as ongoing courage to take informed risks and to learn from our shared experiences.

The following sections share some of the key lessons that we have learned in leading the development of Whistler2020, and continue to learn as we co-create, update and improve the Whistler2020 process and plan. It is our hope that by sharing these insights, your community will be able to move more quickly along the path to achieving your vision of long-term community sustainability.

Community members, organizations and other key stakeholders widely participated in the Whistler2020 planning process through a range of avenues including open houses, workshops, kids' forums, web-based input, as well as numerous surveys. A number of people were also more directly involved in developing the long-term sustainability plan as participants of the Citizen Advisory Group (approximately 25 people) and of the sixteen strategy Task Forces (approximately 140 people). This section provides key lessons specific to direct engagement in the working committees and task forces, rather than for overall public engagement.

Key Lessons learned along the way include:

- 1) **Clearly and honestly define the purpose and scope of participant engagement upfront.** Communicating a well thought out terms of reference for all stages of engagement is essential to manage participant expectations as well as to ensure participant understanding of the deliverables and how they will contribute to those deliverables. For example, be transparent about the degree of input that the group has – are they an advisory body or a decision-making body?

- 2) **Ensure that leaders of the planning process understand the community and the participant audience.** This is important to design appropriate workshop sessions that inspire and resonate with participants.
- 3) **Ensure that group facilitators are highly skilled to provide a good experience and to achieve the required deliverables for the plan in a timely manner.** Leaders of the Whistler process had previous facilitation experience and also engaged in a one-day facilitation training session, that was based on Whistler2020 and potential issues that might arise with respect to the workshops.
- 4) **Establish participant trust in the planning process and the relevance of their contributions to the process.** Trust must often be earned through consistent, high-standard and transparent action from the leaders of the planning process. For example, when making changes to draft written materials, provide participants with a 'tracked changes' version so that they can understand changes while minimizing their review efforts. As well, provide clear rationale why certain actions or other task force recommendations will or will not be implemented.
- 5) **Strike the appropriate balance between widespread community input, a critical component of sustainability planning which results in high levels of ownership, and expert involvement, which may lead to a tighter and more focused project.** Potential ways in which both objectives can be achieved include requesting external reviews and recommendations from experts at various stages of the planning process.
- 6) **Invest in necessary participant training, ensuring that the training is perceived to be relevant by the specific strategy area groups.** For example, sustainability planning requires a basic level of understanding of sustainability among participants. In Whistler, we found that customizing the training to specific strategy areas was essential to ensure that participants perceived it to be relevant to their objectives. As well, the training was distributed throughout the four to five workshops that were held with each task force, rather than providing a single in-depth session at the beginning of the process.
- 7) **Make sustainability meaningful to the participants.** Demonstrate the linkages between economic, environmental and social issues (e.g. poor air quality relates to health and livability and also impacts tourism)
- 8) **Specify and communicate task force participant selection criteria upfront to ensure transparency and credibility.** Ensure that a sufficiently broad range of experts and key stakeholders are represented and that participants from key organizations have decision-making authority and provide appropriate expertise.
- 9) **Invite 'critics' to participate in the process where possible.** Individuals who are critical of the sustainability-planning process often add tremendous value by asking key questions, while building their own understanding and ownership. Ensure that these individuals clearly understand the terms of reference.

Tool C: Citizen Advisory Groups Guidance

Source: *The Art of Swamp Yankee Planning: Making Plans that Work*. (2003). p. 15

It may seem obvious that a "client" for the planning has to be established, and often that choice may appear to be so obvious that this step is trivial, but it seldom is actually that simple. Sometimes, rather than being initiated by a local organization which becomes the clear "client" for the work, planning efforts are pressed onto communities from outside of town government. Examples are state or regional agencies promoting programs, universities eager to give students opportunities, or citizens disenchanted with officials' inaction. In such cases, the client relationship may be quite blurred. Even when the effort is initiated within the local planning board, there are key agency relationship choices to be sensitively resolved.

There are four basic options for structuring agency relationships. The most common choice is for the program's operation to be centered in an existing public agency, such as a planning board, that makes all the key choices about program operation and outcome decisions, quite possibly supported by a network of citizen advisors. This is the presumptive right choice, but there are three key questions that require "yes" answers for this to be confirmed as the right approach.

- Should the planning be done from within town government? If not, a citizens advisory group is the right choice (see below). If working within government is appropriate, then:
- Does any single agency have effective political domain as broad as the topic to be planned? If not, an interagency task force may be the right choice for managing the program. If, however, a single agency does have adequate domain, then:
- Does the appropriate agency have the time and energy to do the job, given its other mandated or perceived duties? If not, then an interagency advisory committee may be the right choice.

A citizens advisory group is the appropriate client group where there is no initial hope of gaining town agency support for the kind of planning sought, or where politics dictates distancing the planning from distrusted agencies and individuals. Be careful: this choice more often leads to spirited and engaging planning events than to implemented change.

The classic comprehensive planning mistake is to believe that a topically centered agency (which is really what most planning boards are) can effectively plan for topics beyond its political domain. If no single agency can fully cover the range of topics to be planned, an interagency task force can be created, and given authority to run the program and make the key decisions. That is very different from inviting other agencies to review and comment on what a single managing agency is singly in charge of. This choice often appears to entail surrender of authority, but it seldom really does so.

If there really is an appropriate town agency with adequate domain, but it doesn't feel it has time to do the planning, then that agency might create an agency advisory committee, giving that committee at least some autonomy from the creating agency, and charging it with managing the planning effort, ultimately to report back to the initiating organization.

Keep it simple. Some federal agencies promote or even require a structure of one agency being in charge, reported to by both a technical advisory committee (TAC) and a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). That's a lot of structure for a small town.



Tool D: Stakeholder Analysis Workshop

Adapted from: *Natural Resources Canada, DRAFT Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods Planning process.*

To ensure that the plan receives proper input from stakeholders, the analysis should identify the range of different stakeholder types including representatives from the surrounding communities, the private sector, different levels of government, local not-for-profit organizations, and foundations/funding agencies. It will also be important to identify expertise required to implement sustainability actions that arise out of action planning. Other potential stakeholders include the local health authority. Identify stakeholders by considering:

- Who are the decision makers?
- Who will be affected by the outcome?
- Who can help achieve the outcome?
- Who could be a barrier to the outcome?

Below is an outline for a Stakeholder Analysis workshop that can be used to help identify key stakeholders and think through how to engage these people. Once a stakeholder analysis has been performed, consider how you may involve each of the key stakeholders. The stakeholder engagement strategy should achieve the following:

- address stakeholder needs to ensure they remain committed;
- determine the importance of each stakeholder to the overall process;
- engage them at appropriate times to ensure they remain involved;
- define an outreach strategy to ensure they remain informed;
- include a feedback mechanism for demonstrating how stakeholder input has been incorporated as the project progresses through to completion; and,
- continue to inform the key stakeholders and the public once the process has moved on to the next steps, and how they can remain involved.

Stakeholder Analysis Workshop Agenda

- 1) Convene a meeting of municipal officials, key business, institutional, and community people (maximum 15-17). Purpose of meeting: to elicit the range and type of stakeholders in the community from people who are the ‘experts’ about who lives and works in their community. It would be useful to have a facilitator for this meeting.
- 2) At this meeting, ask participants about what and who are the various interests in the community from the following sectors:
 - *Municipal staff*
 - *Federal or Provincial government staff, e.g. departments and agencies that will provide support to the project*

- *Funding agencies* and organizations that may provide financial incentives and/or risk sharing (e.g. Infrastructure Canada, Green Municipal Funds)
 - Community members and local champions that have encouraged community sustainability, e.g. green developments, cultural groups, etc,
 - Other stakeholders:
 - *community-at-large*: What types of citizens live (or will live) in the community, according to interests that shape how they look at community life, civic affairs, and municipal expenditures? Try to identify and arrive at 6-8 interest groups that seem to cover most citizens in the larger community.
 - For example: *Seniors? Households with children in school? Youth? Major landowners? Homeowners/renters? Large/small businesses/self-employed? Farmers? Neighborhoods with different perspectives/identities?*
 - *Municipal agencies*: What agencies, boards, etc. will be involved in some part of the planning process?
 - *Community sectors*: What types of institutions, businesses, and organizations comprise the major sectors of the community and local economy?
 - *Local businesses*: What businesses will be involved?
- 3) When all of the above can be carefully identified, it will be probable that all aspects and sectors of the community are now known. Have the workshop participants identify individuals within these sector groups (especially neighborhood and community groups), who might be willing join future strategy area task forces. You may want to keep a list of people to review for later on in the process when strategy area task forces are formed. Ideally, people who are invited to join strategy area task forces will have expertise in that area. For example, a local artist for a potential “arts and culture” task force.

Tool E: Integrating Existing Planning Processes

Adapted from: *Taking Action Towards Sustainability: The EarthCAT Guide to Community Development* pp. 25-27

Many communities have engaged in some forms of planning, and will at any point in time be in the middle of some planning process. Plans may be developed by government agencies, industry councils and other private sector groups, or utility companies. Categories of such local planning includes:

Land use	Arts and culture
Solid waste	Recreation and tourism
Growth management	Historic preservation
Transportation	Water supply and wastewater
Economic development	Energy
Affordable housing	Air quality management
Open space protection	Workforce Development

In fact, if these processes have demanded a lot of time and energy, your community may be suffering from “planning burnout”, especially if the level of effort made has not resulted in concrete results. The approach presented here helps to build on the work of existing agencies, integrate it into your sustainability planning, and — above all — translate their vision and principles into action. By incorporating the other planning documents, where possible, into this process, you can avoid fragmentation or duplication of this process. If done right, this process is certain to make the champions of the other community improvement plans happy, as the community systems begin working together better.

Planning integration should take place at each stage in the process:

- 1) At the beginning, note the planning commitments that the community has already made. Review existing plans that have been prepared and adopted, and whether or not they are in effect. A transportation plan that was released three years ago but hasn't been fully funded is not obviated by the new sustainability plan; it is to be reviewed for whatever visions, goals, strategies, policies and programs it incorporates. The historic preservation working group created a few months ago by artists, developers and the tourism office should not be replaced by the present approach, but invited in and brought into dialogue with all the other stakeholders.
- 2) As your deliberations progress through the next few phases the individual plans that the community is committed to implementing should be an ongoing point of reference. Somebody — the process leader, the Citizens Advisory Group, or a small group of stakeholders — should cull these plans for ideas that can be brought into the deliberations for the sustainability plan. Ideas listed in these plans may be subject to debate and may need further refining, but they are raw material for this planning process at every stage. The work you will be doing with systems analysis



and strategy development may give the community a way to implement an idea from an existing plan that has heretofore seemed too complex, expensive, or politically difficult.

- 3) At the end of the sustainability planning process, when you are creating your Action Plan, the work will include integrating the relevant action steps into each existing plan, and making sure that your overall implementation plan continues the coordination of all these efforts.

One important benefit of bringing the variety of different planning efforts together is that the community will be better able to see the links between the various concerns, and the interdependence of their proposed solutions. Priorities may then be set for the proposals taken as a whole, rather than dealing with each separate compartmentalized issue on its own.

One technique to get the process of alignment off on the right foot is to convene a community meeting dedicated to hearing from all the groups who have community improvement plans pending or already underway. Make a celebration out of it, and structure the process so that each group can describe their highest priorities to the gathering. As you become more familiar with the techniques outlined in this workbook, you will probably find that there is a lot that this process can offer to help revive these other plans and put some of their most important recommendations into action. The following chart illustrates how you might account for the various planning processes and organizations you will need to consult to ensure that your own efforts properly consider the goals and objectives that have been developed elsewhere.

Plan Alignment Chart

Planning Process Underway	Timeframe	Responsible Agency & Contact Person w/ contact info
Transportation Plan	Ten years, updated every five years	Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Jane Buck, Planning Director 333-4444, jbuck@planning.edu
Open Space Plan		
Land Use Plan		
Recreation Plan		
Economic Development Plan		
Solid Waste Plan		



Tool F: Backcasting

Adapted from: Cook, D. (2004). *The Natural Step: Towards a Sustainable Society*. Green Books: Foxhole. pp. 37 – 44.

“Backcasting from principles” means defining success as conditions rather than as a detailed picture. For example, consider the example of a family deciding on which home to buy. It is easier for them to agree on the success factors of that home, rather than trying to agree on every little detail of the home in advance, e.g. the color of the walls, the type of light fixtures, etc. Backcasting from principles is useful in large and diverse groups because i) it is often difficult to agree on the details of success, ii) people are generally hesitant to lock into a scenario based on current technology because they know new technology will come along, and iii) with respect to sustainability, we need a way to determine if that future scenario is actually sustainable.

If we are looking for principles to help us develop a shared understanding of success with respect to sustainability, then they must meet the following criteria:

- (i) correctly build on a clear scientific understanding of the system (i.e. how natural and social systems function),
- (ii) be necessary for sustainability so their application provides direct guidance in setting priorities and promotes understanding of success,
- (iii) be sufficient, or complete, for sustainability so that by applying them we do not systematically neglect essential elements of sustainability,
- (iv) be general enough so that all people could apply them for all activities regardless of scale,
- (v) be concrete so that they are practical and help us analyze and plan ahead, and
- (vi) be non-overlapping in order to avoid miscomprehensions and to facilitate development of clear monitoring tools.

To find these principles it is useful to look towards the scientific community who has described four sustainability principles developed for backcasting³⁰:

In a sustainable society, our ultimate sustainability objectives are to reduce and, ultimately, eliminate our contributions to:

- 1. ...barriers that undermine people’s ability to met their needs. (e.g. lack of economic opportunities)**
- 2. ...a systematic increase in concentrations of substances from the Earth’s crust in nature (e.g. mercury, cadmium from electronics showing up in fish and kidneys).**

³⁰ These sustainability principles are commonly associated with the international not-for-profit organization called The Natural Step and its Natural Step Framework. The principles are the result of over two decades of scientific work and have been put under intense international scrutiny, published in peer-reviewed academic journals. They are not the result of a political dialogue, rather a scientific one. This is the reason the authors of this document feel comfortable suggesting them. Please note that there are other principles, however, these sustainability principles are the only ones that are both i) designed for backcasting because they describe an end result, and ii) the result of an ongoing scientific dialogue.



3. ...a **systematic** increase in concentrations of substances produced by society in nature (e.g. PCBs, DDT, brominated fire retardants)
4. ...**systematic** physical encroachment into nature (e.g. urban sprawl into natural areas)

Although these principles describe sustainability at the highest level, i.e. the sustainability of the human existence in the ecosystem, the community should use them to create a shared understanding of sustainability for communities when they discuss strategy areas that are relevant to their community. For example, consider how the Resort Municipality of Whistler used these principles.

Box: Resort Municipality of Whistler and The Natural Step Framework

The Resort Municipality of Whistler’s Comprehensive Planning Process consists of community dialogues in 16 strategy areas that were important to their community, ranging from *Arts & Culture* to *Learning* to *Energy* to *Water* to *Finance*. In each of these strategy areas a task force of citizens knowledgeable in the area was created to produce three deliverables: i) define success in that strategy area, ii) clarify current reality in the strategy area, and iii) recommend actions bridge success and current reality.

In the first meeting, the task force members were educated on the sustainability principles to create a shared understanding of a sustainable outcome amongst the task forces of what they were all trying to work towards. This way the task forces discussing Arts & Culture, Water, Energy, etc., all had a shared understanding of sustainability at the highest level. This was valuable because it created a common language of sustainability amongst all the citizens in the task forces. As a result the proposed actions from each task force were aligned towards the goals of the task force and the overall shared concept of sustainability. For example, the task force on “Learning” identified actions that move the community towards its vision how it can better provide learning opportunities and alignment with principles of sustainability. For more information on the task forces and the recommended strategies, see: www.whistler.ca

These are long-term principles of success that guide the decision-making. Consider these principles to be like the principles of success in a game, for example, the principles of “checkmate” in chess. When playing chess, we always keep in mind ultimate success, i.e. checkmate, and it always guides our moves. So, in this sense every move made is a step towards checkmate. Early moves, therefore, set up later moves, and provide flexibility, all the while conserving as many pieces as possible. With respect to sustainability, it is the same, where the sustainability principles guide early investments that move towards compliance with the principles, generate sufficient return to seed future investments and provide flexibility for future investments.

Using sustainability principles allows the process of action planning to be initiated quickly. Once the principles are adopted, the community:

- ...identifies how it is contributing to violations of these principles.
- ...brainstorms ideas about how to reduce its contribution to violations of these principles.
- ...prioritizes the actions by asking four questions:
 - Does this action move us towards success as defined by the community?



- Does this action move us towards sustainability, as defined by the principles?
- Does this action provide flexibility for future moves?
- Does this action provide sufficient economic and political return to support future investments?



Tool G: Council Resolution

RESOLUTION # _____
City of Ashland, Wisconsin

Eco-Municipality Designation Resolution

Adoption of Sustainable Community Development Policy

WHEREAS, the City of Ashland has adopted a Comprehensive Plan (2004 – 2024) that calls for “The Making of an Exceptional City”, and includes dozens of references to sustainable practices; and

WHEREAS, the adoption of the four systems conditions of the Natural Step can provide a framework that will assist city employees and elected officials in moving in a more sustainable direction; and

WHEREAS, the willingness of the city to move in the direction of becoming an eco-municipality can serve as a model for others and encourage economic development along similar lines in our city and region; and,

WHEREAS, the City of Ashland has a pledge of support through mentorship and consulting from The National Association of Swedish Eco-Municipalities; and

WHEREAS, the following four guidelines were developed by the American Planning Association to help communities implement sustainable practices:

1. Reduce dependence upon fossil fuels, and extracted underground metals and minerals.
2. Reduce dependence on chemicals and other manufactured substances that can accumulate in Nature.
3. Reduce dependence on activities that harm life-sustaining ecosystems.
4. Meet the hierarchy of present and future human needs fairly and efficiently.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that The City of Ashland hereby endorses the principles of sustainable community development described herein, and agrees to apply these principles whenever possible in its planning, policy making, and municipal practices.

Adopted by the City Council of Ashland, Wisconsin this 13th day of September, 2005

Fred Schnook, Mayor

Date

Attorney

Date

City Clerk

Date



Tool H: imagineCalgary's Visioning Process

The City of Calgary is engaged in a process to develop a 100-year vision for a sustainable Calgary. A key component of “imagineCALGARY” has been broad consultation with citizens to gather input on their vision and values for Calgary. More than 17,000 citizens in Calgary have taken part in a dialogue about the future of their community by answering five questions:

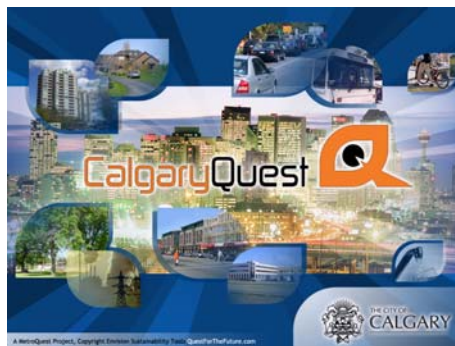
- 1) “What do you value about Calgary?”
- 2) “What is it like for you to live here?”
- 3) “What changes would you like to most see?”
- 4) “What are your hopes and dreams for Calgary in 100 years?”
- 5) “How could you help make this happen?”

A Citizens’ Round Table was set up to synthesize the input from the community to produce a vision statement. The Round Table is comprised of nearly 40 citizen volunteers who are studying the answers, sorting through mountains of other information and working with a variety of experts to write the 100-year vision and identify targets and strategies toward reaching the vision. These citizens were recruited through a rigorous process to ensure that a wide variety of experiences and affiliations were represented.

In addition to the Round Table, a number of other volunteer citizen groups have been set up. These include: five Working Groups which will develop 30 year targets and strategies towards the vision, Advisors who are a variety of experts and interested people who will support the Round Table and Working Groups throughout the process, and a Mayor’s Panel of community leaders to help ensure the legacy of imagineCALGARY is embraced and acted upon by institutions and groups throughout the city.

The imagineCALGARY team has used a number of creative ways to engage citizens. They have organized “Imagining Sessions” ranging from 30 minutes to 3 hours to talk with various groups about the questions. These sessions utilize an interactive tool called CalgaryQuest. CalgaryQuest is a scenario exploration tool that shows users the long-term (40 year) outcomes of different choices and highlights connections between choices and outcomes. This allows audiences to see the integrated nature of issues within a region. Audiences create future scenarios by deciding on a range of options within a number of areas, including:

- Population location
- Job location
- Development density
- Transit plan
- Transportation options
- Energy & air quality programs
- Reduce & recycle programs
- Water conservation programs



- Population growth
- Economic growth

Audience members discuss why they made different choices in these areas and debate the merits of these decisions. Using visually appealing and interactive ways to display the outcomes of these choices, CalgaryQuest allows the audience to then see what Calgary could look like in 40 years, based on their decisions. Rather than focusing on the details of individual maps or charts, discussions in CalgaryQuest sessions focus on the connectedness of issues and how different choices can create different futures.

Citizens are invited to public interactive sessions where they are asked to provide their input on the criteria above and then immediately receive feedback about how these decisions affect the growth of Calgary.

They have also engaged schools to develop programs for students to talk to their parents and community leaders about the questions. Some lucky students had the opportunity to interview players from the Calgary Stampeders, well-known media personalities and even Alberta's Lieutenant Governor!

For more information see the imagineCalgary website: <http://www.imaginecalgary.ca>



Tool I: Canmore's Visioning Process

As a community experiencing rapid physical and cultural transition, the Town of Canmore instigated a pioneering grassroots visioning process in late 2004. Called *Mining the Future*, the effort combines grassroots dialogue, on-line data collection, and scenario building to identify common concerns and values, give voice to community aspirations, and forge a clearly-articulated vision that will direct municipal planning and policy for the next decade.

Over ten months, some 50 “conversation groups” comprising established community groups (service clubs, church groups, schools, etc.) and ad hoc neighbourhood groups meet for five rounds of facilitated conversation. Each round, employing the “World Café” conversation methodology (www.theworldcafe.com), addresses a specific set of questions on topics ranging from desirable community attributes to emerging trends and the causes of the current changes. The results are quickly gathered and compiled using a web-based technology and posted on a *Mining the Future* website. The website, aside from serving as an information and coordination hub, provides a means by which residents who are unable or disinclined to participate in neighbourhood or community groups can contribute through on-line surveys. *Mining the Future* also calls for three larger “Canmore Cafés,” large civic gatherings open to all residents in which participants can hear the latest on the process, exchange information and ideas, and work together on yet more visioning questions.

The leaders of the neighbourhood and community groups meet periodically with the visioning team leaders to assess the data, build scenarios that represent potential futures for Canmore and, using the scenarios as guides, create a vision for the community. According to Lawrence Wilkinson, one top practitioner of scenario planning, “scenario planning derives from the observation that, given the impossibility of knowing precisely how the future will play out, a good decision or strategy to adopt is one that plays out well across several possible futures. To find that ‘robust’ strategy, scenarios are created in plural, such that each scenario diverges markedly from the others. These sets of scenarios are, essentially, specially constructed stories about the future, each one modeling a distinct, plausible world in which we might someday have to live and work.”

The initial conversations will yield four to six scenarios that will be winnowed down to two based on what participants believe represent the most desirable and realistic possibilities for the Town. To develop a vision from the final two scenarios, which may well be divergent, will require good process and great leadership.

Given a community sustainability mandate and the Town of Canmore's prior commitment to The Natural Step as an approach to sustainability, the visioning project team is considering how to scrutinize the scenarios through the “lens” of The Natural Step's sustainability principles (see Tool F). This will mean that the project team will consider the following questions:

- 1) Does the described scenario include systems that would lead to a systematic increase of concentration of substances from the Earth's crust? If so, how could these systems be adapted so this is not the case?

- 2) Does this scenario include systems that would lead to a systematic increase in concentration of substances produced by society? If so, how could these systems be adapted so this is not the case?
- 3) Does this scenario include systems that would lead to a systematic physical degradation of nature? If so, how could these systems be adapted so this is not the case?
- 4) Does this scenario include systems that would undermine the ability of people to meet their needs? If so, how could these systems be adapted so this is not the case?

Once the team and community are able to comfortably answer “no” to these questions, they can feel assured that their community is moving towards a scenario that is both *desirable* and *sustainable*.

The vision will provide the values and the issues foundation for increasingly refined and integrated sustainability planning and implementation. A citizen “learning group” identified during the visioning process will work with the Town on implementation strategies and accountability in political, cultural, social, economic, and environment domains.



Tool J: Writing Vision Statements

Adapted from: *Taking Action for Sustainability: The EarthCat Guide to Community Development*. pp. 49-50

Rendering the volumes of scattered ideas that will have come in from the public feedback sessions into concise but broadly inclusive statements can be a Herculean task. It will undoubtedly feel like you are leaving volumes of information out, but it is necessary to winnow the information down to a clear and intentional statement. This will help your community orient itself as it moves to the future. The following tasks will help you to navigate this challenge in a way that remains inclusive of the public while allowing you to bring the process to a conclusion.

Select one or two people, or a subcommittee of the Stakeholder Group [*or Citizens Advisory Group*], to take all the ideas from the visioning sessions and pull them together in a coherent vision statement. Keep the following tips in mind:

- √ Write the vision in clear, active language.
- √ Reference a reasonable point in the future.
- √ Speak about what the community will look and feel like when you achieve your goals.
- √ Make it accessible to everyone; avoid jargon.
- √ Be sure to address all five main areas of sustainability³¹: social well-being, good governance, vibrant local economy, efficient services and infrastructure, and healthy natural environment.
- √ Build on existing strengths in your community — a vision is most powerful when it has a credible foundation. If you create a vision based on the strengths of the community — on successes that have already occurred, on community events and parks and places you love and are proud of — you give people reason to think the vision can become a reality.

It can be helpful to ask some prominent writers in your community to assist with the drafting of the Vision Statement. While it doesn't need to qualify as literature, it is desirable to keep the wording lively, avoiding dry, bureaucratic language. Plus, having a celebrity involved is always good for credibility and visibility. Above all, keep the final version as simple as possible. A simple Vision Statement will can be remembered, and is thus more likely to become a continuing influence on your community's actions and attitudes.

³¹ Although this is adapted from another document, the AUMA promotes five dimensions of sustainability, which are different from those stated here, i.e. social, economic, environmental, cultural, and governance.

Tool K: Sample Vision Statements

Rural Municipality of Craik's Eco-Village Vision Statement (pop. 760)

"We believe that sustainability will become the dominant issue of the 21st century. Our society needs to develop ways of living that are economically viable and socially just which do not at the same time destroy the ecological base that sustains us and all other life on the planet. The Town and the Rural Municipality of Craik therefore, propose to embark on a joint long-term project in search of ways of living that address the issue of sustainability and rural revitalization through physical demonstration of viable solutions."

For more information about Craik, see <http://www.craikecovillage.ca/>

City of Geneva, New York (pop.13,600)

"The City of Geneva, New York will be a great place to live, work and invest with a commitment to positive open communication and community pride and a model community boasting vibrant residential neighbourhoods and downtown, and a strong economic environment."

Resort Municipality of Whistler's Vision Statement (pop. 10,000)

"Whistler will be the premier mountain resort community – as we move towards sustainability

We are committed to achieving social and environmental sustainability and a healthy economy. We will continue to build a thriving resort community that houses 75% of the workforce in Whistler. We will continue to offer world-class recreational and cultural opportunities for our visitor and residents. We will foster sustained prosperity in our local tourism economy and retain our local businesses. We will continue to strive to protect the local integrity of our local environment. We will meet the social, health, and learning needs of residents and visitors.

We will be a safe community that provides peaceful enjoyment of our activities and places. We will foster cooperation between regional communities and the provincial government on initiatives to expand prosperity and well-being for all. We will monitor our performance at achieving Whistler's vision and report back to the community on an ongoing basis"

For more information on Whistler's vision see:
www.whistler.ca/Sustainability/Whistler_2020/

The following is a sampling of vision statements from various communities.

Cochrane, Alberta (pop. 12,700)

"Proud of Cochrane's heritage, embracing our future, we are a dynamic organization creating municipal excellence."

Guelph, Ontario (pop. 126,000)

"Guelph is a caring community, diverse in its heritage, vibrant in its neighbourhoods and dedicated to:
People

Environment

Innovation

Investment

A place to live, work, learn and play ... a great place to call home.”

Town of Sydney, B.C. (pop. 10,000)

“The overall vision of the Town of Sidney is of a balanced, vibrant waterfront community with a revitalized town centre, which caters to residents, visitors and businesses through the provision of a broad range of services including: efficient transportation, tourist amenities, and cultural and social activities for all segments of the community, while affording optimal opportunities for industrial and commercial development.”

Town of Newmarket, Ontario (pop. 66,000)

“Well Beyond the Ordinary”

Medicine Hat, Alberta (pop. 56,000)

"To help make Medicine Hat a great place for business"

Nanaimo, B.C. (pop. 73,000)

“Nanaimo will be a community that respects people. It will hold neighbourhoods as the building blocks of the city. Nanaimo will be safe and supportive for people of all ages and all income levels. It will be an attractive place to live with the historic downtown core forming the “heart” of the city. Change in the city will be based on the foundation of community participation. Nanaimo will be a community that respects and preserves the environment and one that is pedestrian friendly. It will be a city of social and economic opportunity that has a diverse economy and a wide range of social, recreational, cultural and artistic amenities and services.”

Camrose, Alberta (pop. 73,000)

“We are committed to preserving a high quality of life for all Camrose residents and facilitating progressive development through fiscally responsible leadership.”

Hornby Island, B.C. (pop. 1,000)

“Hornby Islander's have envisioned a future based on our community strengths and our desire to remain a diverse, sustainable and viable community. Central to this vision are the values that we share as a community - creating a balance with the natural world, working together co-operatively and peacefully, taking personal and collective responsibility for the well-being of the community, and celebrating the special spirit and energy of this unique island and its people.”

Sumter’s County, South Carolina (pop.105,000)



“LIVE...LEARN...WORK...PLAY...REVITALIZE DOWNTOWN”

Spruce Grove, Alberta (pop. 18,405)

“We live in a well-planned city built through the strength of partnerships among our own citizens and with those of the greater community. The City of Spruce Grove is committed to the values, attitudes and quality amenities that make our city the community of choice.”

Windsor, Ontario (pop.209,000)

“Windsor, Canada's southernmost city and international gateway, is a diverse community of safe, caring neighbourhoods, with a vibrant economy and a healthy sustainable environment.”

Hamilton, Ontario (pop. 490,000)

“As the citizens, businesses and government of the City of Hamilton we accept responsibility for making decisions that lead to a healthy, sustainable future. We celebrate our strengths as a vibrant, diverse City of natural beauty nestled around the Niagara Escarpment and Hamilton Harbour. We are able to achieve our full potential through access to clean air, safe water and food, shelter, education, satisfying employment, spirituality and culture. We weigh social, health, economic and environmental costs, benefits and risks equally when making decisions.”

Tool L: Sample Vision and Goals

Our Vision Statement

A vibrant community with plenty of rural character, natural beauty, resourceful and imaginative people

We VALUE:

- The spirit and energy of this unique community and its people
- Our connections with the rest of the world
- The strong sense of community trust and belonging
- Innovation and creativity
- Our strong, healthy and sustainable community
- The people who live, work and play here

STRATEGIC GOALS

We will pursue the following long-term goals for each of the five dimensions of sustainable communities:

Social

- Ensure an attractive, livable and healthy community
- Provide excellent quality of life for all citizens
- Foster a community spirit of taking care of each other - like an extended family

Economic

- Ensure a prosperous, healthy and vibrant economy with a mix of businesses that fit with our community's vision
- Foster a creative and adaptive economy that helps move toward a sustainable future

Environmental

- Protect and where possible restore ecosystem integrity and biodiversity
- Ensure where possible that society's infrastructure and processes are designed to operate in balance with natural processes



Cultural

- Arts and culture are part of the fabric of everyday life
- The community cherishes and celebrates its rich and diverse cultural heritage

Governance

- A governance model that:
 - encourages active public involvement;
 - is responsive to the needs of its citizens;
 - is transparent in its decision making;
 - is responsible and accountable; and
 - is honest

Tool M: Facilitator's Notes to Identify Strategy Areas

The following is only a suggested way to hold a meeting to achieve the meeting objectives. The reader should consider it a point of departure for designing their own meetings based on the situation of their community.

Objective of meeting:

- To create a list of relevant strategy areas that need to be considered in order for community to achieve its vision.
- To identify potential members for task forces that will be formed around each of these groupings.

Time to Run: 1 to 3 hours

Materials: Post-it notes, markers, flipchart

Preparation for participants:

Review your community's vision

Set-up:

Depending on the size of the Citizens Advisory Group (CAG), you may want to first organize the meeting into smaller groups. However, if your CAG is under 12 people then you can run the meeting as a single group.

Agenda:

- 1) Review objective of meeting with all participants to make sure everyone is clear on what they are here to do. This should have been made clear when participants were invited to the meeting, but it doesn't hurt to remind them.
- 2) Review the community's vision. This is to set the tone of the meeting and to remind people why we are all here to begin with.
- 3) Ask each participant to write their answers to the question, "What strategy areas need to be addressed for our community to reach its vision?" on post-it notes - one for each strategy area. Tell them to write as many as they can.

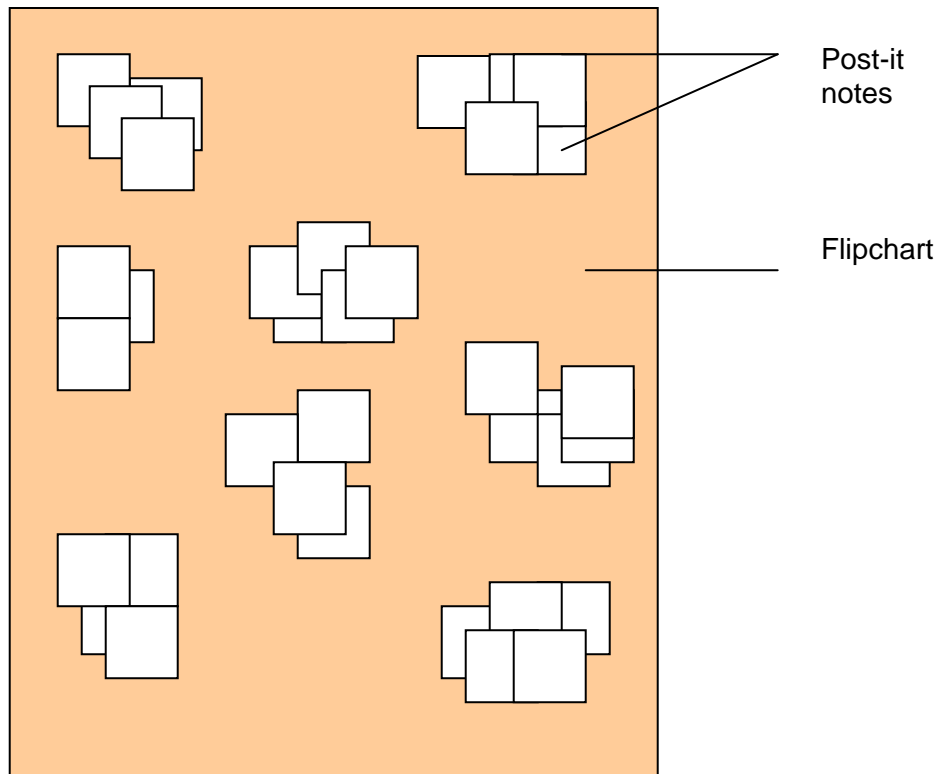
Water
shortages

Educational
Opportunities
for young
people

Creative
Opportunities
for young
people

- 4) Once participants have written their strategy areas on the post-it notes, ask one person to give you their post-it note and explain what it means. Place this on a flipchart or wall that everyone can see. Once you have placed it, then ask if others have a similar strategy area? If so, then try to group these together. Also ask if anyone disagrees that this is a strategy area. Move on to the next person so they have an opportunity to discuss what they see as perceived strategy areas and repeat the process. Continue this until all post-it notes are on the flipchart or wall. Through the course of discussion, there should be some natural

groupings that arise. By the end you should have something that looks like the following:



- 5) Create a list of the groupings and assign them names, such as “Water”, “Arts & Culture”, etc. For each of these strategy areas, a task force will be formed to generate ideas for improvement, and will likely consist of people beyond those on the CAG.
- 6) For each strategy area / task force, ask participants to suggest people from the community who would be willing and able to sit on a task force. At this point, it may be useful to review the roles and responsibilities of the task forces and the suggestions on task force composition in *Phase III*.
- 7) Thank everyone for their participation and remind them of a future meeting or next steps if there are some.

Tool N: Facilitator's Notes for Task Force Sessions

The following is a set of notes for meetings to hold with the Strategy Area Task Force. There are 5 suggested meetings in total, one each to accomplish the following objectives:

- Educate task force members on the MSP planning process and sustainability.
- Develop a Description of Success for the strategy area
- Determine indicators and targets for the strategy area
- Develop a Description of Current Reality for the strategy area
- Brainstorm and prioritize actions

Remember these meetings are opportunities to take advantage of the expertise and experience of task force members to help build the Municipal Sustainability Plan, not to have them review and approve an existing document.

Although these meetings are presented as separate below, the facilitator may want to combine meetings or stretch out meetings into more than one meeting. These notes should be considered a point of departure and be adapted to meet the needs of a community in their particular reality.

Task Force Meeting #1

Objective of meeting:

- To inform task force members on the MSP planning process, the deliverables of the task force, and the sustainability principles

Time to Run: 1 to 2 hours

Materials: [None]

Preparation for participants:

Note: The Natural Step has developed an online course on sustainability, which is being used by some municipalities to educate staff and citizens on sustainability in advance of dialogues. This online course could be used as a compliment or a substitute to this meeting.³²

The facilitator should send out materials in advance of the meeting that describe the integrated community planning process. Ideally, this would include information on the community's vision, the steps / meetings that the task force will go through to develop an action plan, and the sustainability principles. Participants should review these materials in advance of the meeting

Set-up:

Depending on the size of the Task Force (TF), you may want to first organize the meeting into smaller groups. However, if your TF is under 12 people then you can run the meeting as a single group.

Agenda:

- 1) Review meeting objectives and agenda
- 2) Review and discuss the community vision
- 3) Review and discuss the sustainability principles
- 4) Review and discuss the integrated community planning process including subsequent meetings and the primary deliverables of the TF.

³² For more information contact The Natural Step Canada (www.naturalstep.ca)

Task Force Meeting #2

Objective of meeting:

- To develop a Description of Success for the strategy area and a list of community assets.

Time to Run: 1 to 2 hours

Materials: Description of Success Worksheet for Strategy Area (see Tool O for examples), Communities Assets worksheet (see Tool P).

Preparation for participants:

The facilitator should send out a draft Description of Success (DoS) for the strategy area. These are statements that describe how the area would look like if you achieve your vision. See Tool O for examples. Participants should review these materials in advance of the meeting.

Set-up:

Depending on the size of the task force, you may want to organize the meeting into smaller groups. However, if your task force is under 12 people then you can run the meeting as a single group.

Agenda:

- 1) Review meeting objectives and agenda
- 2) Review the community vision and sustainability principles. This is just a reminder for the participants to keep the vision and the sustainability principles in mind as they discuss the DoS. The DoS should be aligned to both the vision and the principles. Two useful questions to ask to ensure this are:
 - *“If we achieved our Description of Success, would it help our community achieve our vision?”*
 - *“If we achieved our Description of Success, would we also comply with the sustainability principles?”*
- 3) Have groups review the DoS and ask *“What edits or additions would you make to the DoS to ensure it properly reflects the vision and sustainability principles?”*

As the facilitator, allow for discussion and debate about the DoS, but remember to keep reminding people about the vision and sustainability principles as screens for suggestions for edits / additions, since this is what the community is working towards, i.e. if the suggestion makes the DoS better reflect the vision and sustainability principles, then keep it, if not then consider how it could be modified so that it does. Remember that the DoS does not have to be achieved today, rather it is something that provides direction to the community as something to work towards in the long-term. Once there is agreement on the DoS, end the discussion. If there are unresolved issues then agree to a process to resolve the disagreements.

- 4) Ask participants: *“What assets do we have in the community to help us achieve our Description of Success?”* and create a thorough list.
- 5) Remind people of the next meeting.

Task Force Meeting #3

Objective of meeting:

- To determine indicators for strategy area. [*Note: the point of this meeting is as much as possible to identify existing indicators in the community relevant to the strategy area that can be used to track progress*] does this mean that no new ideas will be considered, or is this why we've got "as much as possible"?

Time to Run: 1 to 2 hours

Materials: [None]

Preparation for participants:

The facilitator should send out information on indicators already tracked at the municipality or community level relating to the strategy area. Remember it will be useful to ask task force members what is already tracked in the community through their organizations and create a list of this information. Participants should review these materials in advance of the meeting.

Set-up:

Depending on the size of the task force, you may want to organize the meeting into smaller groups. However, if your task force is under 12 people then you can run the meeting as a single group.

Agenda:

- 1) Review meeting objectives and agenda
- 2) Review the community vision, sustainability principles, Description of Success for the strategy area, and the information that is already being tracked in the community related to this strategy area.
- 3) On individual Post-it notes ask participants to write answers to the following question: "*What information would be useful to let the community know that we are progressing on this strategy towards our Description of Success?*" Write one suggestion per Post-it note.

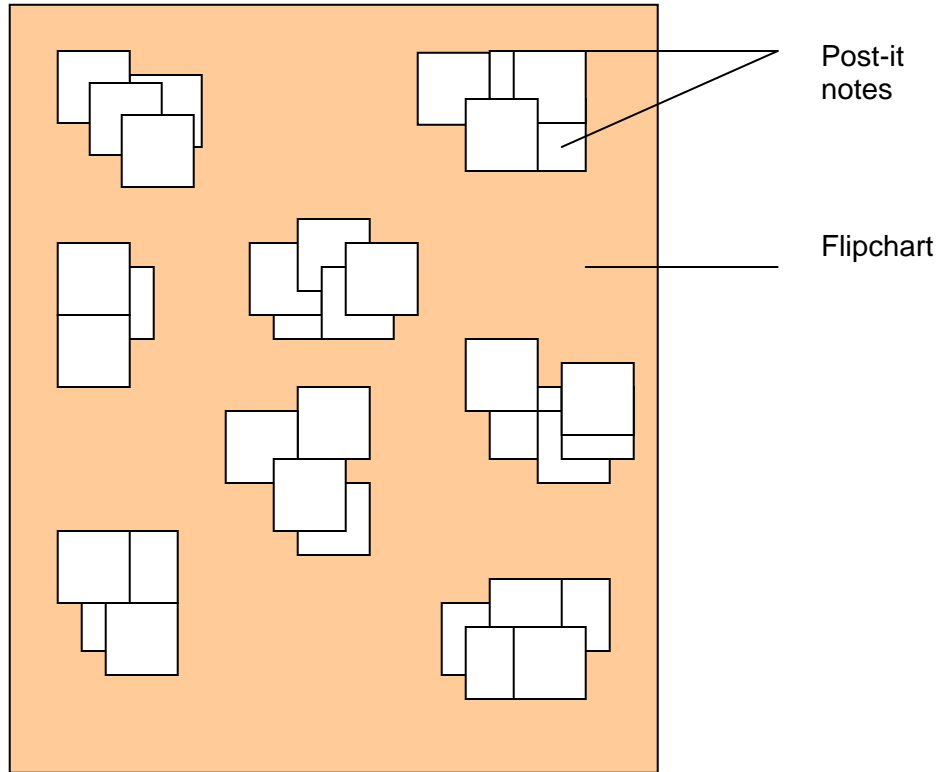
of people
enrolled in
arts classes

Amount of
energy used
in municipal
buildings

Area covered
by wetlands
in the
community

- 4) Once participants have written their strategy areas on the post-it notes, ask one person to give you a post-it note and explain the indicator. Place this on a flipchart or wall that everyone can see. Once you have placed it, then ask if others have a similar indicator? If so, then try to group these together. Also ask if anyone disagrees that it is a good indicator? Move on to the next person so they have an opportunity to discuss their indicator and repeat the process. Continue this until all post-it notes are on the flipchart or wall. Through the course of the

discussion, there should be some natural groupings that arise. By the end you should have something that looks like the following:



- 5) Create a list of the indicator groupings.
- 6) Compare this list to the information that is already tracked and determine if there is sufficient existing data to track progress. If not, then the task force should determine whether it is worth the effort to develop new indicators to track information and who will do it. This does not have to be the municipality; it could be a local non-governmental organization that commits to gathering information.
- 7) Finalize a list of existing indicators and recommended new indicators to track progress.
- 8) Remind people of the next meeting.

Task Force Meeting #4

Objective of meeting:

- To identify Current Reality of the strategy area, including gaps and challenges to attaining the Description of Success for the strategy area

Time to Run: 3 to 4 hours

Materials: Description of Current Reality Worksheet (see Tool S for examples),

Preparation for participants:

The facilitator should send out:

- a draft Description of Current Reality (DoCR) for the strategy area. See Tool R for guidance on how to develop a DoCR and Tool S for sample descriptions. Please note that these descriptions are a summary for discussion, and that background materials, e.g. a consultant's reports, that back up the statement can be sent out as well. The purpose of a summary is to provide a point of departure for discussion, and a way to capture and synthesize discussion from the task force members, not to overwhelm people with information.

Participants should review these materials in advance of the meeting.

Set-up:

Depending on the size of the task force, you may want to organize the meeting into smaller groups. However, if your task force is under 12 people then you can run the meeting as a single group.

Agenda:

- 1) Review the meeting objectives and agenda.
- 2) Review the community vision, sustainability principles, and the Description of Success for the strategy area.
- 3) Discuss the Description of Current Reality worksheet. Ask: "*what edits or additions would you make to the statement based on our understanding of current reality?*" This will be an opportunity to learn as much as possible. The task force members are likely knowledgeable about the strategy area and will be able to help fill out the picture of current reality. Remember to record the comments so that they can be integrated into the DoCR.
- 4) As the facilitator, allow for discussion and debate about current reality, but remember to keep reminding people that the point is to generate an accurate picture of current reality, i.e. if the suggestion makes the current reality more accurate, then keep it, if not then consider how it can be modified so that it does. Once there is agreement on the Description of Current Reality, move on to the next point of discussion. Sometimes there may be a lack of critical information, and the task force may recommend that a future action be to find the information. For example, a municipality may need baseline information on the amount of waste it generates from operations, so the first proposed action for the task force may be as simple as purchasing a scale. If there are unresolved issues then agree to a process to resolve the disagreements.
- 5) Remind people of the next meeting.

Task Force Meeting #5

Objective of meeting:

- To brainstorm ideas to close the gap between current reality and success in the strategy area.
- To prioritize actions into short-, medium, and long-term actions.
- To assign responsibility for actions.

Time to Run: 0.5 to 1 day

Materials: Prioritization Worksheet (see Tool V), Summary Action Plan Grid (see Tool X)

Preparation for participants:

Participants should brainstorm and research potential innovative actions in advance of the meeting.

Set-up:

Depending on the size of the task force, you may want to first organize the meeting into smaller groups. However, if your task force is under 12 people then you can run the meeting as a single group.

Agenda:

- 1) Review meeting objectives and agenda
- 2) Review the community vision, sustainability principles, Description of Success and Description of Current Reality for the strategy area.
- 3) Have participants brainstorm ideas and write down each idea on a flipchart at the front of the room, and introduce the prioritization questions³³.
“Does this initiative or investment:
 - 1) ...move us towards our community’s definition of success?
 - 2) ...move us towards the sustainability principles?
 - 3) ...provide flexibility for future community leaders to take action?
 - 4) ...generate sufficient economic and political return to seed future investments?”
- 4) Ask participants to flag any projects that are obviously not strategic, i.e. that:
 - ...move the community away from the sustainability principles;
 - ...may interfere with movement toward other elements of your Description of Success in this or other strategy areas;
 - ...are not flexible platforms; or
 - ...are obviously poor investments.

³³ Guidance on the Prioritization Questions can be found in *Tool U*.



For any actions that are flagged, discuss why they were flagged and what could be done to solve the problem. This may result in changes to the actions, entirely new actions being put forward instead, or simply that the actions in question are marked to ensure that implementers look for ways to mitigate the strategy areas that have been identified.

5) For the rest of the projects write them down on a grid that looks something like this:

Idea	Question #1	Question #2	Question #3	Question #4
????????	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
????????	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
????????	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No

Using the prioritization questions determine whether the actions are:

- **Immediate actions** (i.e. “easy wins” or “low-hanging fruit” that can be implemented this year) [An answer of Yes to all four questions]
- **Medium-term actions** (i.e. actions that are very attractive and should be implemented in 1-2 years, but that will require integration with business planning and budgeting processes)
- **Longer-term actions** (i.e. actions that should be considered as future investments, more than 2 years from now, perhaps because they are deemed too costly at this point, etc..)
- **Actions to be deleted from consideration** (i.e. actions that move the organization away from success and sustainability and are not flexible platforms to future improvements and/or that are obviously poor investments of resources).

6) For all immediate actions, use the following grid to assign responsibility and the indicator used to track progress.

Action	Responsible Org.	Support Org(s).	Timeline	Indicator	Link to Other Strategy Areas
Install green roof on new community center	Water Commission	1) Public Works 2) Local Builder	1 year	Energy use	Energy, Built Environment



Tool O: Lessons on Descriptions of Success

The following outlines the experience of process leaders from the Resort Municipalities of Whistler's award-winning comprehensive planning process, Whistler 2020. Although most Albertan communities are different from Whistler, the experience of the people who led the process provides some insights into the challenges of a participative planning process and how to overcome these challenges.

This section shares some of the key lessons that we have learned in leading the development of Whistler2020, and continue to learn as we co-create, update and improve the Whistler2020 process and plan. It is our hope that by sharing these insights, your community will be able to move more quickly along the path to achieving your vision of long-term community sustainability. To learn more about Whistler 2020, the Resort Municipality of Whistler's comprehensive planning process, see <http://www.whistler.ca>.

In Whistler2020, the Description of Success defines what success looks like with respect to specific strategy areas by the year 2020. Task forces developed these statements based on Whistler's sustainability objectives (or sustainability principles) and resort community values to guide actions toward Whistler's short and long-term success and sustainability. Task forces developed draft Description of Success statements for their respective strategies by contributing, reviewing and editing statements until agreement was reached among the group. All sixteen Whistler2020 Descriptions of Success were adopted by Council and are now part Whistler's highest-level municipal policy directions.

Key lessons learned along the way include:

- 1) **Establish and adopt a shared vision that addresses fundamental assumptions on key community strategy areas before creating Descriptions of Success.** Formal agreement on a common vision and/or fundamental assumptions with respect to potentially controversial topics provides boundaries and clear direction for the work of the task forces. For example, Whistler adopted a shared vision of continuing to be a "premier mountain resort community", where economic development always contributes to and is compatible with a tourism economy. This formally adopted vision provided clear notions of future direction, and set boundaries around task force discussions, allowing them to achieve their terms of reference.
- 2) **Establish and adopt a common understanding of sustainability before creating Descriptions of Success.** A common language and framework for describing and evaluating sustainability is absolutely key. Through Council adoption, Whistler committed to using the four Natural Step sustainability principles as the basis of our approach.
- 3) **Provide a clear context and explanation for how the Descriptions of Success are going to be used once completed.** Understanding the Descriptions of Success' prominent roles in the planning process can help to ensure that participants contribute the appropriate level of consideration and attention. For example, Whistler's monitoring primarily measures community-wide performance against the Descriptions of Success, as these are ultimate outcome objectives.

- 4) **Use results-based statements versus prescriptive Description of Success statements.** Prescriptive Description of Success statements are less effective as they tend to reduce flexibility around selecting the best future actions to achieve outcomes. For example, “*transportation options are developed so that inter-community mobility minimizes the negative impacts of traditional modes of travel*” (results-based) is preferable to “*rail infrastructure is the preferred means of all corridor travel*” (prescriptive). Using indicators or metrics to assess the statements can help the development of results-focused statements.
- 5) **Develop the Descriptions of Success as a series of concise and non-overlapping bulleted statements, as opposed to a continuous paragraph.** Breaking the Description of Success into statements ensures equal attention to each of the statements, promotes clear and focused thinking, and improves their ability to be used in multiple implementation and decision making formats and tools.
- 6) **Ensure that the Description of Success is a comprehensive reflection of the community’s identified vision and agreed-upon sustainability principles.** Reflecting these important directions in the Descriptions of Success is essential to minimize and avoid conflicting statements across strategies and to promote community-wide ownership. Integrating the highest-level vision and sustainability principles also reduces the need to refer to multiple levels of policy for direction, which can be cumbersome.
- 7) **Share all Descriptions of Success between the strategy area task forces during the creation and refinement phases.** This will help reduce any redundancy between strategy areas and to build understanding and trust among the various strategy area task forces.
- 8) **Engage external expert advice and input where appropriate.** Allowing for expert advice and commentary on Descriptions of Success increases participant knowledge and provides additional expertise into both visioning scope and potential technical insights. Construct the terms of reference for external input in a manner that provides a useful third party input but also ensures that the task force’s sense of ownership of the product is maintained.

Tool P: Description of Success Worksheets

Exercise:

Read through the Description of Success and while considering the following questions, edit or add to the Description of Success where needed.

Questions:

- 1) Are these Descriptions of Success for “**Affordability**” similar to your community?
- 2) What would you add, remove or change so that it is relevant to your community’s reality in this strategy area and consistent with the community’s vision?

Descriptions of Success	Additions and Edits
<p>Community residents are able to afford the time, products and services that enable them to enjoy the lifestyle that the community has to offer. In the future:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Income and innovative benefits help make it affordable to live and play here 2. Residents have access to affordable goods and services that meet their needs 3. Diverse and affordable opportunities for recreation, leisure, arts and culture exist 4. A buy-local culture helps to circulate wealth within the community and the region 5. Resident housing is affordable for permanent and short-term residents 	

Exercise:

Read through the Description of Success and while considering the following questions edit or add to the Description of Success where needed.

Questions:

- 1) Are these Descriptions of Success for **“Water”** similar to your community?
- 2) What would you add, remove or change so that it is relevant to your community’s reality in this strategy area and consistent with the community’s vision?

Description of Success	Additions and Edits
<p>Water resources provide a dependable supply of healthy water to meet the long-term needs of people, and nature. In the future, potable water supply systems deliver water of excellent quality, meeting or exceeding all relevant health standards and benchmarks for aesthetic standards whenever possible</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Water supply is distributed reliably, equitably and affordably – and is managed proactively within the context of effective and efficient emergency preparedness2. Residents and visitors are educated about, and encouraged to protect and conserve natural water resources3. All potable water is used sparingly and only used to meet appropriate needs4. Wastewater and bio-solids and associated substances are readily assimilated in nature5. Water supply, wastewater management and flood control infrastructure minimize energy requirements, and favour sustainably managed materials and resources6. Effective stormwater management and flood control measures are in place, and replicate natural hydrological systems and functions as much as possible7. Potable water supply source protection is optimized8. Healthy streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands support thriving populations of fish, wildlife and aquatic invertebrates	



Exercise:

Read through the Description of Success and while considering the following questions edit or add to the Description of Success where needed.

Questions:

- 1) Are these Descriptions of Success for “**Economic Development**” similar to your community?
- 2) What would you add, remove or change so that it is relevant to your community’s reality in this strategy area and consistent with the community’s vision?

Description of Success	Additions and Edits
<p>In the future our community’s economy respects ecological constraints, provides a quality of life that attracts and retains community members. By this time:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The economy provides opportunities for achieving competitive return on invested capital 2. The economy is part of closed loop process for products and services 3. Locally-owned and operated businesses thrive and are an encouraged component of a healthy business mix 4. Local businesses play an important role in helping the community achieve its social, cultural and environmental goals 5. A skilled workforce supports the local economy, and the local economy supports the skilled workforce 6. Effective partnerships with government and other organizations support economic health 7. Physical (i.e. Communication networks, Roads, Airports) and social infrastructure (i.e. social networks, friends, schools) attract and support work and investment 8. The size of the economy has increased and the level of employment has increased 9. Increase the real median household income of community residents 10. Distribution of income throughout the economy is achieved 11. The economy is able to successfully adapt to external factors. 	



Exercise:

Read through the Description of Success and while considering the following questions edit or add to the Description of Success where needed.

Questions:

- 1) Are these Descriptions of Success for “**Learning**” similar to your community?
- 2) What would you add, remove or change so that it is relevant to your community’s reality in this strategy area and consistent with the community’s vision?

Description of Success	Additions and Edits
<p>In the future the community has developed and facilitated learning opportunities that enable personal and professional development By this time:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Diverse and affordable lifelong learning opportunities exist to meet the community’s needs2. A learning culture is nurtured and promoted locally and regionally through diverse formal and informal opportunities3. The early learning needs of children in the resort community are met4. A high quality kindergarten through post-secondary education system offers a diversity of programs to meet the needs of the community5. Opportunities exist within developed and recreational areas for people to learn about the natural environment6. Learning opportunities contribute to the local economy7. Learning opportunities foster collaboration, trust and community engagement	



Exercise:

Read through the Description of Success and while considering the following questions, edit or add to the Description of Success where needed.

Questions:

- 3) Are these Descriptions of Success for “**Natural Areas**” similar to your community?
- 4) What would you add, remove or change so that they are relevant for your community?

Description of Success	Additions and Edits
<p>In the future our community protects and, where possible, restores ecosystem integrity and biodiversity in all critical natural areas. By this time:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. An ecologically functioning and viable network of critical natural areas is protected and, where possible restored2. Use of sensitive natural areas is avoided and use of surrounding areas is limited to ensure ecosystem integrity3. Indigenous biodiversity is maintained4. Backcountry areas are protected from overuse and degradation5. A policy of no net habitat loss is followed, and no further loss is preferred6. Developed and recreation areas are designed and managed to protect as much of the natural environment within and around them as possible7. Community members and visitors act as stewards of the natural environment8. Continual learning about natural areas and species informs appropriate restoration and protection efforts9. Neighbouring communities adopt similar Descriptions of Success10. Natural systems guide management approaches	



Tool Q: Worksheet to Identify Assets in Task Force Meetings

Create a list of assets in your community that can be building blocks to help you reach success and your community's vision. Although you will want to think through in more detail assets relating to your strategy area, also consider assets for the community as a whole.

Consider:

- The networks that you can access, e.g. people you know who are experts
- The organizations that exist in your community, e.g. arts groups, schools
- Infrastructure that can be utilized, e.g. recycling centers, theaters
- Natural features, e.g. geothermal energy from aquifers
- Current initiatives / plans, e.g. visioning processes, energy reduction plans
- Businesses, e.g. an organic farm, a bio-fuel business.

BE CREATIVE! You will be surprised at all you already have in your community.

Asset #1: _____

Asset #2: _____

Asset #3: _____

Asset #4: _____

Asset #5: _____

Asset #6: _____

Asset #7: _____

Asset #8: _____

Asset #9: _____

Asset #10: _____

Asset #11: _____

Asset #12: _____

Asset #13: _____

Asset #14: _____



Tool R: Resources for Indicators

Ideally, existing measures can be used to monitor progress and new indicators will not need to be developed, however below are resources to consider when determining appropriate indicators.

- 1) **Sustainable Communities Indicators Program (SCIP)** is an Internet-based reference guide to help communities and organizations develop indicators of sustainability and establish a sustainability indicators program. The SCIP website can be found at: <http://www.ec.gc.ca/soer-ree/English/Scip/default.cfm>
- 2) The **Genuine Progress Indicators (GPI)** is a measurement system for use by nations, states and communities to determine their progress towards a sustainable future. The GPI provides a comprehensive account of sustainable development - including economic, social and environmental factors - as compared to a more narrow and traditional measure of development, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which considers only economic growth. The Pembina Institute has created a GPI for Alberta which is available through their Fiscally Green website at <http://www.fiscallygreen.ca/gpi/index.html>
- 3) The Winnipeg-based International Institute for Sustainable Development has compiled **Compendium: A Global Directory to Indicator Initiatives**, which is an excellent starting point. Visit www.iisd.org/measure/compendium
- 4) Redefining Progress has developed a **Community Indicators Handbook** and a set of tools and sustainability indicators that include the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) and Ecological Footprint Analysis. For more information visit www.redefiningprogress.org
- 5) The **Guide to Sustainable Community Indicators** by M. Hart (1999) and the author's accompanying website www.sustainablemeasures.com

Example – The Oregon Benchmarks program consists of a framework of 269 indicators and targets covering a diverse range of strategy areas around sustainability including categories such as children and families, education and work force, health and health care, clean natural environment, equal opportunity and social harmony, and economic prosperity. Reports are available from the Oregon Progress Board website: <http://egov.oregon.gov/DAS/OPB>

Example - The Pembina Institute has created a Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) for Alberta. GPIs are measurement systems for use by nations, states and communities to determine their progress towards a sustainable future. The GPI provides a comprehensive account of sustainable development - including economic, social and environmental factors - as compared to a narrower and more traditional measure of development, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which considers only economic growth. Pembina has found that while Alberta's GDP continues to rise, the province's GPI has levelled off, indicating that economic prosperity may be occurring at a cost to the environment and the social well-being of communities. The report and its 51 indicator summaries are available online at <http://www.fiscallygreen.ca/gpi/index.html>

Example - In Ontario, Hamilton-Wentworth's Sustainable Community Indicators Project arose of the regional municipality's Vision 2020 initiative. This vision of a sustainable

future was developed by a citizen's Task Force on Sustainable Development appointed by the regional council; over 400 individuals and 50 community groups took part in the visioning process. The Indicators Project measured progress toward the goals outlined in the Vision 2020 document and drew on participation of the community throughout the process. While the final set of indicators are intended for decision-makers, the prime goal was developing a set of indicators which were understandable and useful to local citizens. Vision 2020's Sustainability Indicator's report is available online at www.vision2020.hamilton.ca



Tool S: Lessons on Descriptions of Current Reality

The following outlines the experience of process leaders from the Resort Municipalities of Whistler's Award-winning comprehensive planning process, Whistler 2020. Although most Albertan communities are different from Whistler, the experience of the people who lead the process provides some insights into the challenges of a participative planning process and how to overcome these challenges.

This section shares some of the key lessons that we have learned in leading the development of Whistler2020, and continue to learn as we co-create, update and improve the Whistler2020 process and plan. It is our hope that by sharing these insights, your community will be able to move more quickly along the path to achieving your vision of long-term community sustainability. To learn more about Whistler 2020, the Resort Municipality of Whistler's comprehensive planning process, see www.whistler.ca.

In Whistler2020, the Description of Success defines what success looks like with respect to specific strategy areas by the year 2020. Task forces developed these statements based on Whistler's sustainability objectives and resort community values to guide actions toward Whistler's short and long-term success and sustainability. Task force developed draft Description of Success statements for their respective strategies by contributing, reviewing and editing statements until agreement was reached among the group. All sixteen Whistler2020 Descriptions of Success were adopted by Council and are now part Whistler's highest-level municipal policy directions.

In Whistler2020, the Current Reality descriptions provide an overview of strategy area specific situations in Whistler *today*, and attempts to highlight the key challenges and gaps between '**Where we are**' today and '**Where we're going**' in the future (Description of Success, see below). Understanding this baseline provides the strategy Task Forces with a starting point for identifying informed actions capable of moving our community toward our vision.

Key Lessons learned along the way include:

- 1) **Be honest, and don't forget to highlight your community's successes and accomplishments in addition to challenge areas or shortcomings.**
- 2) **Don't let the Current Reality section overwhelm the entire process or document.** Strategy development Task Forces need to understand 'where the community is...' primarily to as a means to empower the group to develop informed actions. Resist the tendency to create an extensive 'state-of-the-community report', instead concentrate on understanding priority gaps relative to a well articulated vision and sustainability objectives, and on creating and prioritizing strategic actions.
- 3) **Use tools such as 'Key Opportunities', 'Executive Summaries' and separate 'Tools' to communicate the majority of Current Reality data.** As excessively long planning documents generally are not read by a majority of the community, produce final products that are accessible, concise and engaging to large audiences.
- 4) **Present Current Reality information in a framework that is consistent with the Description of Success content.** A common structure is important to

enable participants to see direct linkages between: the vision (ultimate objectives), the current reality (opportunity areas), and proposed actions (that address opportunity areas).

- 5) **Present Current Reality information with appropriate and comprehensive referencing.** The Current Reality information has the capacity to become a useful baseline resource for staff and the community alike. To promote and facilitate such everyday use of your document, ensure that full referencing is included throughout this section. Referencing builds credibility and also ensures that intellectual property and community input is valued and respected.
- 6) **When additional research is required to develop the Current Reality (and it will be) direct this intention toward the ‘Action Development’ phase.** The Current Reality is fundamentally a review of existing literature and resources. Keep track of desirable yet missing datasets or information and re-channel the thought into an action for future improvement of the Current Reality. For example, Whistler’s Economic Task Force prioritized an action to assess the current and future retail/commercial mix in Whistler³⁴.
- 7) **Ensure that strategy-specific financial information and current budget resources are included as baseline data as is possible.** Failure to do so may lead to inappropriate action planning, as well as unrealistic participant expectations and thus scepticism in the ability of the process to access appropriate financial resources for implementation.
- 8) **Design your process to ensure each Task Force member has the inclination, time and ability to understand and internalize the Current Reality content.** Effective action development and prioritization is fundamentally premised on all task force members being familiar and comfortable with the information contained within the Current Reality. As such, failure to achieve this understanding can compromise the final products.

³⁴ Whistler 2020 Economic Strategy, Approved 2005 Actions, p19.



Tool T: Descriptions of Current Reality Worksheets

Exercise

Read through the Description of Current Reality. While considering the following questions edit or add to the Description of Current Reality where needed.

Questions

1. Is this the current reality for “Affordability” similar to your community?
2. What would you add, remove or change so that they are relevant for your community?

Description of Current Reality	Additions and Edits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High costs of housing relative in incomes 2. Large number of entry level jobs that pay lower incomes 3. Transportation costs for goods (e.g. food, lumber) due to the remoteness 4. Seasonal Employment 5. Poor financial management skills 6. High demand for housing from outside the community driving up prices 7. Lack of affordable housing 8. Limited competition for services, driving prices up 9. High property taxes relative to incomes as taxes based on market assessments 10. Wealth leaves the community to parent companies 	

Exercise

Read through the Description of Current Reality. While considering the following questions edit or add to the Description of Current Reality where needed.

Questions

1. Is the current reality for “**Water**” similar to your community?
2. What would you add, remove or change so that they are relevant for your community?

Description of Current Reality	Additions and Edits
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Consumption patterns reflect high use of water resources2. Waste water exceeds permit levels of nutrients and chemical compounds at times3. Boil water advisories every so often4. Citizens have a false sense of abundance5. Lack of education/awareness6. Water is relatively inexpensive7. Lack of money to upgrade systems8. Building standards and codes are too lax9. Lack of regulations for groundwater10. Lack of water metering11. Lack of effective regulations/governance at senior government levels12. Pollution from septic and landfill leaching13. Impact of Climate Change14. Impact of roads on storm water management15. Multiple land use pressures i.e. recreation, resource extraction impacting water quality and habitat	



Exercise

Read through the Description of Current Reality. While considering the following questions edit or add to the Description of Current Reality where needed.

Questions

1. Are these Descriptions of Current Reality for “**Economic Development**” similar to your community?
2. What would you add, remove or change so that they are relevant for your community?

Description of Current Reality	Additions and Edits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Economic growth is declining or stagnating 2. Transportation infrastructure is dated and frequently in construction 3. Energy, sewer, water infrastructure reaching capacity 4. Communication infrastructure is not ideal 5. Cost of doing business is high relative to other communities 6. Not aware of other possible economic opportunities 7. Limited Commercial Space 8. Sharing of economic information amongst businesses is low 9. Can't attract/develop enough skilled labour 10. Climate change causing resource costs to increase 11. Is resource (Land, Energy, Water) intensive 12. Threatens the local environment 	



Exercise

Read through the Description of Current Reality. While considering the following questions edit or add to the Description of Current Reality where needed.

Questions

1. Is the current reality for “**Learning**” similar to your community?
2. What would you add, remove or change so that they are relevant for your community?

Description of Current Reality	Additions and Edits
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Difficulty recruiting and retaining educators2. Lack of time and affordability to take part in learning activities3. Low enrolment in high school leads to lack of creative programs4. Lack of collaborative planning amongst all the education organizations5. Low awareness of learning opportunities6. Limited learning culture supported in community7. No incentives to participate in additional learning8. Lack of access to programs due to remoteness of location9. Expensive child care10. No courses on learning how to learn to foster understanding of others and collaboration11. Limited public access to the web	



Exercise

Read through the Description of Current Reality. While considering the following questions edit or add to the Description of Current Reality where needed.

Questions

1. Is the current reality for “**Natural Areas**” similar to your community?
2. What would you add, remove or change so that they are relevant for your community?

Description of Current Reality	Additions and Edits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Negative impacts from climate change 2. Economic diversification impacts on natural areas 3. Adjacent local government natural area policies or lack of 4. Lack of capacity to implement policies/strategies 5. Lack of regulations and bylaws with effective 'teeth' 6. Historic impact on sensitive habitats 7. Increased demand from public recreation - esp. motorized recreation 8. Competing land uses 9. Lack of understanding and information regarding carrying capacity 10. Lack of an understanding/knowledge re: local biodiversity and sensitive areas 11. Enforcement and staffing resources - e.g. Parks staff 12. Education/awareness of residents 13. Introduction of non native flora 14. Increased pressure from physical development 	



Tool U: Sources for Innovative Actions

- **Making the Case for Culture** – A document released from [creativecity.ca](http://www.creativecity.ca), an organization of people employed by municipalities across Canada working on arts, culture and heritage policy, planning, development and support. It includes a number of best practices of communities that have used culture as an economic engine. Available at: <http://www.creativecity.ca/resources/making-the-case/>
- **InfraGuide** - InfraGuide is a national network of experts and a growing collection of best practice publications for core infrastructure - offering the best in Canadian experience and knowledge of infrastructure. Available at: <http://www.infraguide.ca/>
- **Harmony Foundation's Green Cities – a Guide to Sustainable Community Development** – A 124-page guide that provides a clear and comprehensive overview of Sustainable Community Development, inspiring community success stories and lots of practical information, including how to establish community priorities, encourage citizen participation, and build local leadership. References, worksheets, facts on important trends Available at: <http://www.harmonyfdn.ca/pubs.html#GreenCities>
- **Federation of Canadian Municipalities Center for Sustainable Community Development.** The Centre encourages municipal governments to improve their environmental performance and to enhance quality of life for Canadians through sustainable community development. The Centre's programs provide financial support and build capacity for Canadian municipalities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the quality of our air, soil and water. Available at <http://www.fcm.ca/english/cscd/cscd.html>
- **ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability** – ICLEI is an international association of local governments and national and regional local government organizations that have made a commitment to sustainable development. More than 475 cities, towns, counties, and their associations worldwide comprise ICLEI's growing membership. ICLEI works with these and hundreds of other local governments through international performance-based, results-oriented campaigns and programs. Available at: <http://www.iclei.org/>
- **Towards Sustainable Communities: A Resources for Citizens and their Governments** – A book from Simon Fraser University's Centre for Sustainable Community Development that is full of innovative projects that have been implemented around the world. Available at: <http://www.sfu.ca/cscd/>
- **The Natural Step for Sustainable Communities – How Cities and Towns can change to sustainable practices** – A book that contains case studies and best practices of communities around the world that have used The Natural Step Framework for sustainability planning. Available at: <http://www.naturalstep.ca/resources.html>

Tool V: Guidance on Prioritization

Question #1: Does this initiative move us towards our community's definition of success?

Consider how whether this initiative moves the community towards the Description of Success defined by the task force.

Question #2: Does this initiative move us towards sustainability?



Assess the initiative with respect to its contribution to the four sustainability principles using the following questions (ideally, the action should move towards all four sustainability principles, not one at the expense of others). General questions include:

1. Will this action reduce our dependence on any activities that interfere with other people's abilities to meet their needs?
2. Will this action reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and on extracted metals and minerals that can build-up in nature?
3. Will this action reduce our dependence on chemicals and other manufactured substances that can build up in nature?
4. Will this action reduce our dependence on activities that result in a physical degradation of natural systems?

Use a table similar to Table 1 to record your answers to these questions.

Most actions will also involve **trade-offs**. Even if it involves trade-offs, an action may still be appropriate to invest in if (1) it creates a flexible platform for future steps and a mechanism is put in place for those steps to be taken, or (2) it helps to build capacity (e.g. human, social, financial) to take future actions. Only eliminate actions that move away from sustainability in the long-term, and brainstorm alternatives if an action is positive in terms of one sustainability principle and not others.

Table 1: Evaluating Actions Using Sustainability Principles (SP)

	SP#1	SP#2	SP#3	SP#4
Improve? 				
Trade-off? 				

Question #3: Does this initiative or investment provide flexibility for future community leaders to take action?

It is unlikely that any single action will help us achieve sustainability and our Description of Success on its own. Therefore, for each action that involves trade-offs, you should ask:

- Is it a 'flexible platform' from which additional steps can be taken towards achieving sustainability and our Description of Success (or does it represent a 'dead end')? In other words, is it possible to go forward from this action to a next step, reducing our impact on nature or people even more?

E.g. if a resident housing complex is not heated in a fully sustainable way today, are the buildings situated to facilitate passive solar heating and photovoltaics in the future, when this technology will be more cost effective?

- Alternatively, does this action eliminate future options for improvement? What are these options? What is the likelihood that they could become relevant in the future?

E.g. consider a major expenditure to build a pipeline that allows a community to switch from propane to natural gas for heating. The switch in fuel source results in an incremental improvement in emissions, however, it also requires a large capital investment that the community will need to pay off for decades. If the ultimate goal of the community is to be completely free of fossil fuels for heating (e.g. through geo-thermal), the cost of the pipeline may create financial barriers to future investments in geo-thermal. In essence, though an incremental improvement in emissions would be achieved, by building the pipeline, the community may be locking themselves into natural gas for decades to come and exposing itself to risks associated with it (e.g. rising costs).

Ask the question "...and then what?"

One useful way to evaluate if an action is a flexible platform is to ask the question "then what?" until a path to sustainability and success can be identified. Consider the following example from Whistler:

The Resort Municipality of Whistler was facing pressures due to growth and one of the issues that they needed to address was how they were going to provide energy to their community, an issue that touched on its social, cultural, environmental and economic sustainability. At the same time Whistler was developing its Comprehensive Sustainability Plan, which defined long-term success for the community.

*Whistler's current primary energy supply for heating is from propane shipped by truck. Terasen, an energy provider, proposed that Whistler's future energy needs could be secured through the construction of a \$42 million dollar pipeline extension that would provide natural gas. Initially, the municipality thought it was a good investment because it would secure energy for the long-term, and result in an immediate reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. However, upon reflecting on how this investment their long-term vision of success, it raised some interesting question. They asked "**how is the pipeline extension an investment, or stepping-stone, towards our vision of success in which our community's energy is derived form renewable sources?" or "after the pipeline, then what?"***

They realized that if they invested in the pipeline it would mean that all new construction would need to be built to run on natural gas, basically locking the community to be dependent on natural gas for the long-term, a potentially problematic situation considering the rise of natural gas prices. They had also been experimenting with geothermal technologies to provide heating homes that had proved successful. Not to mention the large cost of the pipeline that the citizens of Whistler would need to pay off over the next 50 years. So after asking these questions they realized that the natural gas pipeline extension was not a good first investment towards their vision of success. However, they did not reject the proposal outright, they instead went back to Terasen and told them that they still wanted to work with them to secure Whistler's energy future. The challenge for Whistler was that the pipeline extension was not a good investment towards their vision of success and if Terasen could help them achieve this vision.

The resulting dialogue between the municipality and Terasen resulting in alternative proposals that included experimentation with renewables, energy efficiency, setting up a local municipally-run utility and a lower capacity pipeline that has the ability to be converted to carry hydrogen. The municipality was able to ask the proper questions and come up with alternate solutions because they were able to test today's investments against a future vision of success.

Finding the answer may require technical research and an inter-disciplinary group of people who can see the big picture. However, the level of effort for this technical evaluation should be proportional to the scope of the proposed policy or regulation or the size of the expenditure. Smaller and less expensive projects and purchases (e.g. coffee) are inherently flexible platforms because you can simply purchase something different next time. On the other hand, larger projects that represent significant sunk costs (e.g. wastewater treatment plant) and/or have a direct affect on other decisions (e.g. energy systems) require extensive analysis because they define the long-term scope of upcoming possibilities. See Table 2 for an example of how the Resort Municipality of Whistler has distinguished the level of diligence required for small versus large investments.

Table 2: Flexible Platform Evaluations³⁵

Small initiatives (minor policy measures or expenditure less than \$250,000)	Large initiatives (major policy or expenditure greater than \$250,000)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the question “this action, and then what?” until all sustainability objectives are met. • If that is not possible, consider the next 3 most likely steps towards sustainability. • Based on these next steps, make efforts to prevent the action from eliminating options toward sustainability in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the question “this action, and then what?” in-depth. If necessary, retain outside technical expertise, requiring that experts understand and respond to the 4 sustainability principles in their analysis. • Does the action allow the areas affected by the policy or project to meet the 4 sustainability principles? If not, what are the shortfalls or obstacles? • What might be some reasonable

³⁵ Source: the Resort Municipality of Whistler



	<p>technical solutions for these shortfalls? (list possibilities). How might they be implemented in the Whistler context? What is their financial likelihood (refer to “Good Investment” considerations)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What future options, if any, are obstructed by this action (e.g. a ‘quick win’ minor building retrofit may preclude a major sustainability retrofit due to sunk costs)? • What alternative actions could provide the same progress (e.g. service improvement)? How can any obstructions be eliminated?
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Question #4: Does this initiative generate an adequate economic and political return on investment to seed future moves?

This question relates to the financial and political feasibility of the action. Is the action an ‘easy win’ or a ‘low-hanging fruit’? A good financial case for proposed actions is important to free up financial resources to take other steps towards success and sustainability – no matter whether the organization in question is private or not-for-profit. Some actions are also worthwhile because they help to build political and/or public support for future moves. In general, compare progress towards success and the sustainability principles with the net cost of the initiative where higher ‘progress to net cost ratios’ are better.

The questions below are provided to offer guidance on how to consider the full financial and economic implications to build a business case. However, the size of the project will determine the depth of financial analysis needed. For example, there is no need to do such an in-depth analysis if the community wishes to hold a series of community workshops on sustainability, however, in depth analysis may be required if the project being considered is a community energy system, or a new arts and cultural center.

Step 1: Calculate progress as a result of the action

- What progress is likely to be made towards the preferred future and the sustainability objectives? What is the anticipated performance of this action? Quantify this progress where possible (e.g. 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions). □
- What are the expected qualitative benefits? (e.g. new opportunity for the community to participate in educational programs).
- What are the anticipated economic spin-offs associated with this action? Does this action help to better use today’s infrastructure (social and physical) and defer expenditures? Does the action save the use of other resources?

Step 2: Calculate the net cost of actions

Consider the total costs less the total revenues associated with the measure under consideration. As a general guideline, consider the following:

Direct Costs:



- What is the total capital cost?
- What are the total up-front administration costs (e.g. human resource costs for preparation of a new policy)?
- What are the expected total operating expenses (discounted to present value)? Consider as long a term view and low discount rates as possible. In the case of a project, this term should reflect its true lifetime.

Direct Savings and Revenue:

- What is the **potential revenue generated** by this action?
- What are the **total capital savings** realized by carrying out this initiative?
- What are the **total operational savings** expected by carrying out this initiative (discounted to the present)? Consider as long a term view and low discount rates as possible. In the case of a project, this term should reflect its true lifetime.
- Will the initiative help to build **political and/or public support** for future moves?

Other considerations include:

What is the opportunity cost of the action? Does the action contribute to the operational efficiency of the organization? Does it give an early return on investments? What is its full life-cycle cost? What is the level of risk associated with the action/inaction? What are the expected social costs?

In making these calculations:

- Reach a common understanding of the terms 'progress', 'net cost of action' and other considerations.
- Understand the limits of these calculations and measures. For example, direct costs are one element of the overall picture.
- Consider actions cumulatively, as the financial benefits from high return actions should finance future actions that may not be as financially profitable.
- Consider questions 3 and 4 in tandem: (i) investments should be technically and ecologically as flexible as possible to ensure the ability of further investments in line with the vision of sustainability, and (ii) amongst the various flexible alternatives, those with the highest and earliest return on investment (low hanging fruit) should be chosen first.

Throughout the process, it is essential to align long-term goals with ongoing economic and political realities. As each measure is designed to move towards success and sustainability, it must pay off soon enough to optimize future progress through a stronger economy, and/or increased social or political capital.

Further Resources to Make the Case for Sustainability

Below are further resources you may want to consult in determining the financial or economic case for your project.

- **Culture as an Economic Engine.** Published by the Creative City Network of Canada. A document released from creativecommons.ca, an organization of people employed by municipalities across Canada working on arts, culture and heritage

policy, planning, development and support. It includes a number of best practices of communities that have used culture as an economic engine. Available at: <http://www.creativecity.ca/resources/making-the-case/>

- **Demonstrating the Economic Benefits of Integrated, Green Infrastructure - Final Report.** Prepared by Sustainable Edge for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. March 2004. Available at: www.sustainablecommunities.ca.
- **The Sustainability Advantage: Seven Business Case Benefits of a Triple Bottom Line.** Bob Willard (2000). Published by New Society Publishers. To understand the business case for the initiative you may also wish to consider the 7 areas of benefit discussed in *The Sustainability Advantage* (New Society Publishers, 2000) by Bob Willard. Though they are expressed with for-profit enterprises in mind, most of them are also relevant in the public sector.
 - Reduced recruitment costs
 - Reduced attrition costs
 - Increased employee productivity
 - Reduced operating expenses
 - Reduced expenses at commercial site
 - Increased revenue / market share
 - Reduced risk, easier financing.

Information available at: <http://www.sustainabilityadvantage.com>. A spreadsheet to calculate the financial impact of these areas of benefit for your organization is available from the author, who can be reached via the website: <http://www.sustainabilityadvantage.com>.

Tool W: Prioritization Matrix

Below is a table to support task forces with prioritizing actions.

Strategy area: _____

Does this initiative or investment:

- 1) ...move us towards our community's definition of success?
- 2) ...move us towards the sustainability principles?
- 3) ...provide flexibility for future community leaders to take action?
- 4) ...generate sufficient economic and political return to seed future investments?

Idea:	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No



Tool X: Summarize Strategy Area Actions

This worksheet can be used to summarize the Proposed Action and its like to i) who is responsible for seeing it through, ii) the organizations that will provide support for the initiative, iii) the timeline for the action to be implemented, iv) the link to which indicator that will measure progress towards sustainability, and v) the link to other strategy areas.

Strategy area: _____ (e.g. Water)

Action	Responsible Org.	Support Org(s).	Timeline	Indicator	Link to Other Task Forces
Install green roof on new community center	Water Commission	1) Public Works 2) Local Builder	1 year	Energy use	Energy, Built Environment



Tool Y: Resources for Ongoing Implementation and Monitoring

Resources for Sustainability Reporting

Many businesses and communities are used to providing annual reports that focus on finances and major accomplishments. A sustainability report provides information on the community's progress towards achieving the vision sustainability principles adopted by the community. These reports can range from simple documents that to externally-reviewed reports. Some examples and resources for sustainability reporting include:

- 1) The **Town of Okotoks** in Alberta has a website that provides information on its progress towards sustainability with its Sustainable Okotoks project.
<http://www.okotoks.ca/sustainable/overview.asp>
- 2) The **Canmore Community Monitoring Program** of the Town of Canmore, in association with the Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley, produces a bi-annual report detailing demographic, social, economic, and environmental trends and conditions in the community. This program grew out of the recommendations of the 1995 Growth Management Strategy Report.
<http://www.biosphereinstitute.org/?q=node/8&PHPSESSID=2e5a14600b19a772d1ac4881356aacf2>
- 3) The **Fraser Basin Council (FBC)** is an organization that is focused on advancing sustainability throughout the entire Fraser River Basin in British Columbia, and includes a number of smaller communities. The long-term vision of the FBC is to ensure that the Fraser Basin is a place where social well-being is supported by a vibrant economy and sustained by a healthy environment. A number of sustainability reports and updates from communities in the FBC can be found at:
http://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/publications/fbc_reports.html.
- 4) **AccountAbility** is a non-profit organization in the UK that has created an internationally-recognized set of stakeholder engagement and sustainability reporting standards as part of their AA1000 series. Visit <http://www.accountability.org.uk/>
- 5) **The Sigma Project** has developed a free downloadable guidebook and a comprehensive set of tools for sustainability planning and reporting that are available at www.projectsigma.com
- 6) The **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)** is an international, multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at creating a common global framework for voluntary reporting of the economic, environmental and social impact of organization-level activity. The GRI mission is to elevate the comparability and credibility of sustainability reporting practices worldwide. www.globalreporting.org

Resources for Integrating Sustainability into Decision Making

Below are a set of tools and examples to support the integration of sustainability into decision-making. This usually consists of considering the decision to be made along multiple dimensions or "bottom-lines", such as economic, environmental, social and cultural. Although these tools are ever evolving and improving, they should be useful in

helping each municipality consider how they can integrate sustainability into their decision making.:

- 1) The **City of Victoria** created a community advisory committee to help draft a vision for the municipally-owned Dockside lands. It then created a points-based “triple-bottom-line” matrix for deciding on the winning proposal. Each sustainability dimension (economic, social and environmental) was assigned 100 points as well as a number of ‘pass-fail’ criteria, such as a minimum purchase price. The final decision-making process had to remain confidential, so the council brought in a community fairness advisor to build trust and transparency into the process. For more information visit.
http://www.city.victoria.bc.ca/cityhall/currentprojects_dockside.shtml
- 2) The **Resort Municipality of Whistler** uses the science-based Natural Step framework to guide its sustainability planning and decision-making. Its planning and implementation processes empowered the community to develop sustainability goals and targets and the community has signed over a dozen partnership agreements with local organizations and businesses committed to supporting the plan. Whistler aligned its annual budget with the Whistler 2020 criteria to incorporate sustainability into corporate decision-making and has amended its community grant process so that applicants must now demonstrate how their project contributes to the community’s sustainability. Implementation is overseen by a cross-departmental sustainability office and sixteen community task forces representing more than 140 community members. For more information visit: www.whistler.ca
- 3) **Vision 2020** is Hamilton’s long-term vision of a vibrant, healthy, sustainable future shared by local government, citizens, business, groups and organizations. Reporting was established to facilitate the implementation of the Growth-Related Integrated Development Strategy (GRIDS), a long-range planning process that will identify a broad range of land use structures, associated infrastructure, economic development strategy, and the financial implications of growth options in Hamilton over the next 30 years. Critical to the GRIDS process is the development of a tool that can assess the social, environmental, and economic impacts associated with each development option that may emerge. Vision 2020’s Sustainability Indicator’s report is available online at www.vision2020.hamilton.ca
- 4) The **International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI)** and the **Hamilton-Wentworth** community have developed a web-based, sample MBL decision-making and evaluation tool that is available at:
http://www6.iclei.org/tbltool_example/
- 5) A more extensive **Triple Bottom Line Toolkit** has been developed by ICLEI and various Australian municipalities and presents TBL reporting tools, planning and policy tools and decision-making tools. The decision-making tools include undertaking assessments for Council reports, capital works projects, procurement and human resource decisions. Visit <http://www6.iclei.org/anz/tbl/>
- 6) The **City of Victoria** developed a triple-bottom-line matrix to evaluate project proposals that consisted of a combination of pass/fail and rated criteria with a total of 300 points distributed evenly among environmental, social and economic categories; a minimum score of 50 points in each category and a “pass” for all pass/fail criteria was required for the project to proceed to Council for consideration. A copy of the

matrix can be found in the Request for Proposals document available through http://www.city.victoria.bc.ca/cityhall/currentprojects_dockside.shtml



Tool Z: List of Resources

Although there are other sources of information reviewed the following are the main sources used in the development of this guidebook.

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