

# **What is... Integrated Community Sustainability Planning ?**

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**An Introduction to the  
Prince George Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP)**

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## **Introduction**

The concepts of Sustainability, and Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) are recent trends in local government. These can be complex terms that are difficult to understand.

The concept of sustainability was first brought forward in 1987 when the United Nations' Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development) presented information concerning development on a global scale. Specifically, the Commission stated that; "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." <sup>1</sup>

## **Planning in Communities**

Communities traditionally plan for single service issues such as water supply, economic development, parkland and transportation. However, a number of local government plans such as the Official Community Plan (OCP) and Corporate Plan focus on multiple issues. The concept of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning is intended to provide a tool to ensure all areas of sustainability (or pillars of sustainability), typically: environment, social, and economic, are considered together in a manner that is integrated and inclusive. The time horizon of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning is usually much longer than most existing plans. Integrated Community Sustainability Planning is not new. What is new is the global awakening to the fact that we need to do better in an integrated way, not just manage each single issue as it presents itself in a community. Everything is connected.<sup>2</sup>

Issues facing communities today are different than they were 20 or 30 years ago. Today there are more external factors affecting communities such as the influence of a global economy and the local effects of large scale global levels of pollution. Local issues facing communities are more complex. Many issues facing communities are also cumulative impacts as a result of the past 100+ years of human settlement.<sup>3</sup>

One example of a complex issue is related to land use planning and development. Communities in North America have a history of sprawling expansion. Many communities had significant development in the 1950's through 1970's which favored single family homes and large residential lots. This sprawling development required a large amount of infrastructure such as water pipe, sewer pipe and roads to serve a small number of people. The cost to

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<sup>1</sup> G. Brundtland et al. Our Common Future. (New York: 1987)

<sup>2</sup> G. Hallsmith, C. Layke and M. Everett, "Taking Action for Sustainability, The EarthCAT Guide to Community Development." (A Global Community Initiatives Paper: 2005) available from <http://www.earthcat.org/>

<sup>3</sup> C. Lindberg and S. Connely, "Bridging the Sustainability/Planning Implementation Gap" (presentation at the Building Sustainable Communities Conference, Kelowna, BC, November 20-22, 2007).

maintain this infrastructure when it was new was relatively small. As the infrastructure ages, the cost to repair and replace it becomes significantly higher. The difference between the funding available through taxation of community residents to maintain this infrastructure and the actual higher cost to repair and replace the infrastructure as it ages is known as the “*infrastructure deficit*”. The recently released report by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimates that the cost to maintain municipal infrastructure in Canadian municipalities above current taxation rates has reached \$123 Billion in 2007, and is growing. This is a local government example of un-sustainable development.<sup>4</sup>

### **Population Growth, Development and Resource Use**

Growth in populations within the USA and Canada are increasing significantly. From 1990 to 2000 the USA population increased by an average of 3.3 Million people each year, that is the equivalent of adding 33 cities of 100,000 people every 12 months. At the same time the Canadian population growth was equivalent to adding 3 cities of 100,000 people every 12 months<sup>5</sup>.

It is possible that when the North American population doubles, or triples, or multiplies by 10, at some point the population growth, development, pollution and consumption of resources at our current standard of living will exceed the available resources. At the global scale this issue becomes even more relevant. For example, developing nations such as China are increasing population at an even higher rate than North America.<sup>6</sup>

When looking at the population growth statistics, the need for building infrastructure for this expanding population in an efficient manner becomes clear. What is needed are energy efficient buildings, well designed neighborhoods to reduce transportation needs and infill and redevelopment of existing serviced areas. As resources increase in cost and decrease in supply, the need to reduce the amount of resources required to maintain our day-to-day life becomes apparent.

### **The Environment: Weather Changes and Global Warming**

The effects of un-sustainable practices are not only a local problem. A recent global indicator of current human activity being un-sustainable and exceeding the earth's ability to support is considered to be climate change or global warming; a symptom of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases released from human activity. The extreme weather events in recent years such as hurricanes, flooding, drought and wildfires, have been widely reported and attributed to

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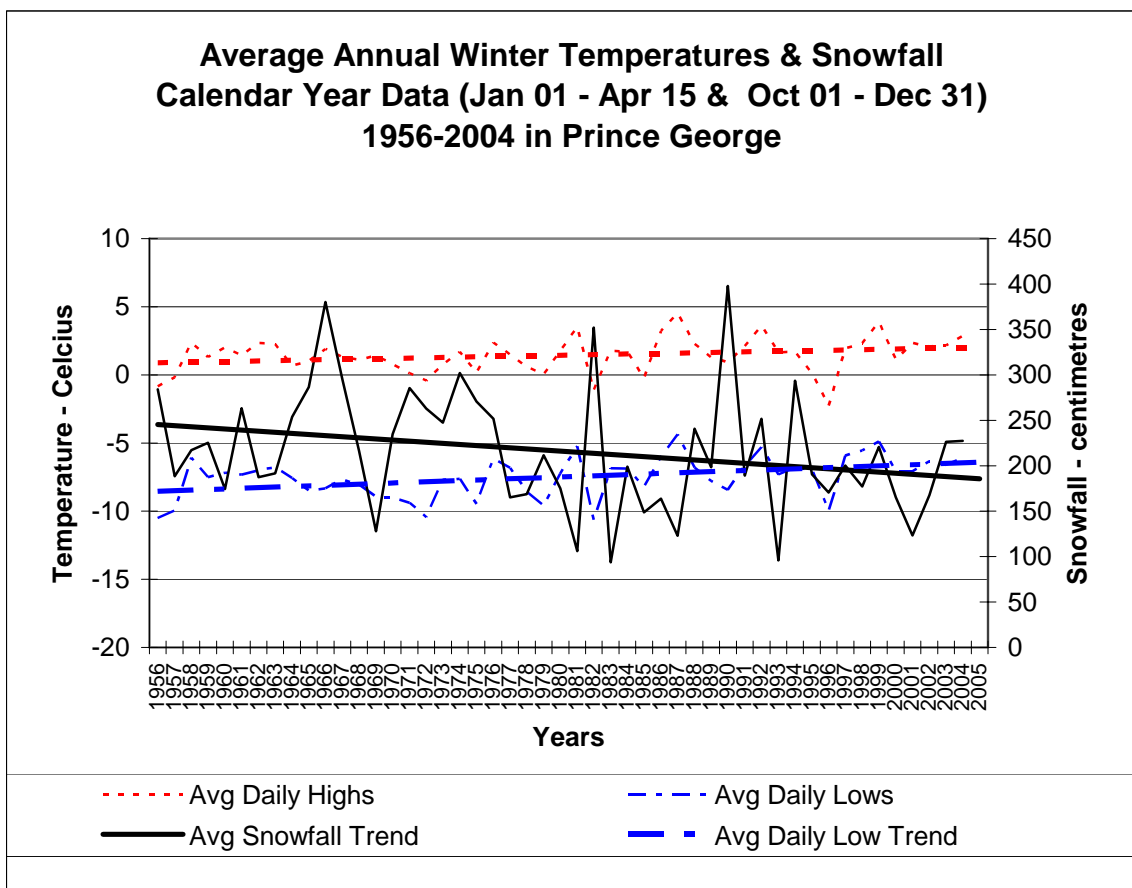
<sup>4</sup> S. Mirza, “Danger Ahead: The Coming Collapse of Canada’s Municipal Infrastructure,” (A report for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities: November 2007) available from <http://www.fcm.ca/english/advocacy/deficit.html>

<sup>5</sup> L. Brown, Eco-Economy, (New York: 2001)

<sup>6</sup> Dr. G Zovanyi, “The Growth Management Delusion” (presentation at the Building Sustainable Communities Conference, Kelowna, BC, November 20-22, 2007).

climate change. Media and political attention have also raised the public profile of this issue.<sup>7</sup>

Closer to home, BC examples of changes in historical weather patterns are visible in the mountain pine beetle infestation that is sweeping across BC, due in part to the lack of historically cold weather required to kill the beetle<sup>8</sup>. Changes in weather have increased the frequency of freeze-thaw cycles and wind storm events in Prince George. The City has recently experienced flooding events featured in provincial and national news from higher than normal spring run off and winter ice jams. The weather trend tracked by the City's Transportation Division for snow removal planning shows increased average temperatures and a reduced snowfall trend from 1956 to 2004.



Source: F. Blues, City of Prince George Transportation Division

<sup>7</sup> A. Riemer, "Climate Change 101 for Local Governments" (presentation at the Building Sustainable Communities Conference, Kelowna, BC, November 20-22, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> A. Carroll, S. Taylor, J. Regniere and L. Sfranyik, "Effects of Climate Change on Range Expansion by the Mountain Pine Beetle in British Columbia" Natural Resources Canada Information Report BC-X-399, Victoria, BC (2003) p. 298

Issues such as climate change introduce uncertainty into the short and long term planning horizon. An ICS-Plan should also consider possible related issues such as; frequency of wildfire, flooding, availability of fresh water resources, temperature changes, increased freeze thaw cycles and frequency of extreme weather events for example.

### **Integrated Community Sustainability Planning in Canada**

Integrated Community Sustainability Planning emerged in Canada in the early 1990's, one early example being Hamilton, Ontario's "Vision 2020" plan, and more recently Calgary, Alberta's "Imagine Calgary" plan. The framework for sustainability planning may follow one of many well known models, such as The Natural Step (TNS), Partners for Long Term Sustainability (PLUS)<sup>9</sup>, and Sustainability Planning and Design Essentials (SPADE), there are also many more models. A smaller localized form of planning; Smart Growth, will be applied to a downtown area of Prince George.

### **Integrated Community Sustainability Planning in BC**

The Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) Initiative in BC is a Province of BC initiative that started from the 2005 Federal-Provincial-Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Federal Gas Tax Agreement (GTA). This ties provincial interest in addressing climate change to encouraging municipal governments to develop healthier, less costly and more sustainable communities. The ICSP initiative encourages communities to review they way they look at the future, and to envision, plan and implement actions to secure long term well being. By building on existing planning tools and providing the framework, the ICSP initiative helps communities plan for their own needs while ensuring the needs of future generations can also be met.<sup>10</sup>

The BC ICSP initiative encourages communities that haven't been planning to start planning. Most BC communities have been very progressive in community planning; the ISCP initiative is designed to encourage better planning. The main sustainability issue for communities that triggers involvement in ICS-Planning is distinctly separated by geography in BC. Communities in the Southern 1/5 of the province are struggling with growth management, while communities in the Northern 4/5 of the province are concerned about economic stability.<sup>11</sup>

### **Integrated Community Sustainability Planning in Prince George:**

ICSP's generally consider at least three main areas (or pillars of sustainability): environment, social, and economic. These are widely used in planning and

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<sup>9</sup> A. Clarke and A Erfan, "Regional Sustainability Strategies: A Comparison of Eight Canadian Approaches." *Plan Canada* (Vol. 47, No. 3, Autumn 2007), p 15-18.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Community Services, Province of BC, "The Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) Initiative, April 16, 2007" available from [http://www.cserv.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov\\_relations/icsp.htm](http://www.cserv.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov_relations/icsp.htm) accessed November 2007

<sup>11</sup> J. Chess, Manager, Fraser Basin Council Upper Fraser Region, interview by author November 22, 2007.

decision making. The Prince George ICSP is organized into four main areas: Economic Development and Diversification, Land Use Plans, Social Development Strategy, and Environmental Stewardship.

**Integration of Sustainability Pillars:** One of the cornerstones of ICSP is integration of each area (pillar of sustainability) when making decisions rather than focusing on improving or planning for one area in isolation. For example, a plan for improving an economic issue would also consider the environmental, land use and social aspects, and not solely the economic situation in isolation.

**Integration Within City Operations, and Partners:** A guiding principal in the Prince George ICSP is integration between the City and other levels of government and non-government organizations to meet the needs of the community. What may be required in one area may not be directly within the City's sphere of influence, but be provided by another resource in the community. The ICSP provides for coordination between plans and programs internal and external to City operations and the community. In this way, efficiency can be maximized and systems can be better utilized.<sup>12</sup>

**Integration of Existing Plans:** The Prince George ICSP will utilize existing plans and commitments. The first phase includes inventory of all existing plans, to be cataloged and included in the ICSP. Inventory of outside agencies and other resources' plans is also being conducted. These existing plans will form part of the ICSP. Gaps where information and programs are missing will then be identified to be filled.<sup>13</sup>

**Long Term:** ICS-Planning is useful in long term planning. Some ICS-Plans have a vision for the community 30, 50, or 100 years from now, then "back-cast" or create a roadmap on how to get to that future from today. This thinking brings larger and more complex problems into perspective. There may not be a two year solution. It may take 10 years to move the issue to a desired future state, which requires this long term and integrated perspective in order to plan for and achieve real results.

**Education and Engagement:** ICS-Plans are a major cultural shift based on a complex principal that requires some education on the subject before stakeholders can be engaged. Understanding, then engagement with everyone is needed to create a plan that has community input and vision. Communication is the key.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> D. Bates, City Manager, City of Prince George, interview by author November 29, 2007

<sup>13</sup> A. Clarke and A Erfan, p 15-18.

<sup>14</sup> M. Mucha, "Implementing Sustainability Planning and Changing Behavior: Lessons from the Field" (presentation at the Building Sustainable Communities Conference, Kelowna, BC, November 20-22, 2007).

**Monitoring:** Indicators, or measurables for each pillar of sustainability (Economic Development and Diversification, Land Use Plans, Social Development Strategy, and Environmental Stewardship) will be developed for the Prince George ICSP. Indicators in each pillar can be measured in the community to determine progress of the plan, and to identify areas that need more attention.

**Implementation:** The Prince George ICSP has a primary goal of being a usable working plan for every part of the City's operation. It will be continuously improved, not put on a shelf.<sup>15</sup>

**Long Name:** Integrated Community Sustainability Planning is a mouthful. The BC Government ICSP initiative has recently received a name change for communicating with communities, to: "Smart Planning for Communities". The gas tax reference will remain ICSP, but the new name will be used in outreach<sup>16</sup>. Each community creates a name for their ICS-Plan, for example Calgary created "Imagine Calgary", and Hamilton created "Vision 2020". The Prince George ICSP will also receive a new name in the future.

**Underway:** Phase 1 of the Prince George ICSP is underway, which consists of creating an inventory of current plans, a framework for the plan, basic indicator selection, sub-committees for developing sections of the plan framework and development of a process for public consultation. The goal is to design the Prince George ICSP over the next eight months, reporting to Council monthly from January through July 2008, for Council approval of Phase 1 by September of 2008. Phase 2 will begin the public engagement process.

Each community has unique resources and challenges. What works in another community may or may not work in Prince George. The ICSP must be a local plan with local solutions<sup>17</sup>. The Prince George ICSP is not about stopping what we do until the plan is created<sup>18</sup>. It is about doing better based on what we know today, integrated planning for the long term, and for better ideas to be incorporated in the future for continued sustainability. Start with what we can do now. Learn, plan and facilitate what we can do better in the future<sup>19</sup>.

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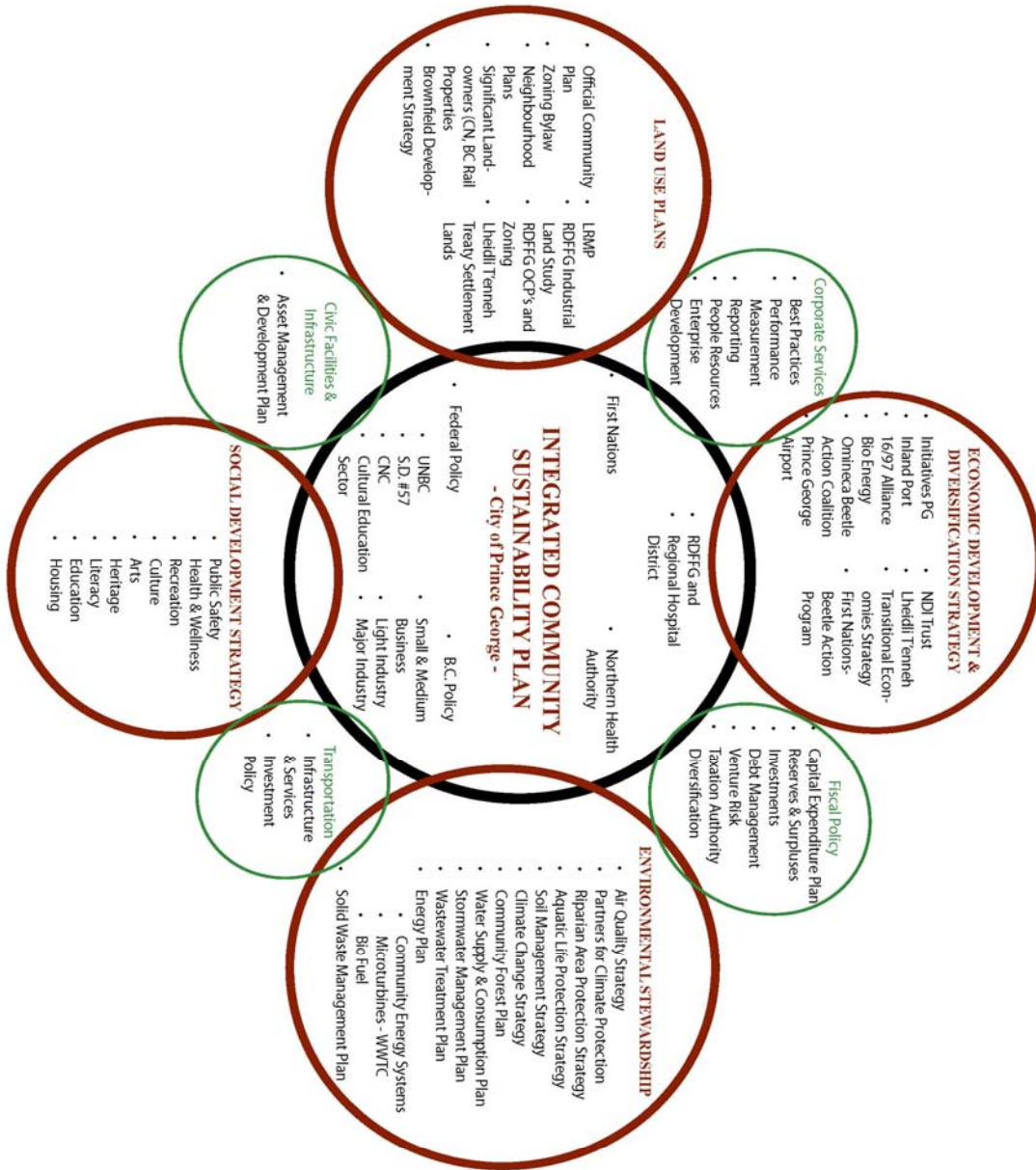
<sup>15</sup> D. Bates, interview

<sup>16</sup> M. Storzer, Planning Systems Analyst, Province of BC Ministry of Community Services, interview by author November 28, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Dr. C. Ling, "Critical Infrastructure for Sustainable Development" (presentation at the Building Sustainable Communities Conference, Kelowna, BC, November 20-22, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> D. Bates, interview

<sup>19</sup> M. Holland, "The Climate Change Playbook: Building a Roadmap and Toolkit for American and Canadian Cities" (presentation at the Building Sustainable Communities Conference, Kelowna, BC, November 20-22, 2007).



Prince George ICSP Structure, Source, D. Bates, City of Prince George

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