



Moving Sustainability Forward: Smart Planning for Practitioners

*Summary Report on the November 2009 workshop
co-facilitated by Columbia Basin Trust and Fraser Basin Council*



Fraser Basin Council



Smart Planning
for Communities

Contents

Smart Planning for Practitioners: Workshop Overview..... 2

- What was the purpose of the workshop?..... 2
- Who attended the workshop? 2
- What did participants want out of the workshop? 2

Smart Planning for Practitioners: Summary of Presentations..... 3

- Sustainability Planning: Starting the Conversation in Your Community 3
- Planning for People: Dawson Creek’s Experience..... 4
- Visions to Actions: Rossland’s Experience 4
- Building Capacity and Collaboration: Regional Resilience, Reason and Respect 5
- Innovative Local Engagement Strategies: Golden’s Experience 5

Smart Planning for Practitioners: Themes from Participants’ Input..... 6

- Interactive session summaries 6
- Thoughts for food 7
- Workshop wrap-up 7

Smart Planning for Practitioners: Conclusions and Next Steps..... 8



Smart Planning for Practitioners: Workshop Overview

What was the purpose of the workshop?

On November 4 and 5, 2009, Columbia Basin Trust (CBT) and Fraser Basin Council (FBC) co-hosted the *Moving Sustainability Forward* event for local and First Nations governments to come together around key sustainability topics to:

- share practical strategies and lessons learned between communities, and
- provide inspiration and information necessary to encourage communities to continue to take action.

The event was composed of three distinct workshops: *Smart Planning for Practitioners*, *East Kootenay Affordable Housing Forum* and *Championing Sustainable Transportation in the Kootenays*. This report focuses on sharing summary information and feedback from the *Smart Planning for Practitioners* workshop.

The *Smart Planning for Practitioners* workshop focused on the topic of sustainability planning. The combination of presentations and interactive sessions were co-facilitated by Sabrina Curtis, CBT Director of Planning and Development, and Laurie Cordell, FBC Sustainability Facilitator for the Smart Planning for Communities Program.

Local government practitioners learned about how other communities conducted a local sustainability or “smart” plan, as invited presenters shared their perspectives on key successes and lessons learned. Participants then worked through exercises that focused their thinking on how they could prepare their own community for a sustainability planning process.

The workshop aimed to add to participants’ knowledge, networking and resources to bring more clarity and direction to sustainability planning. It was also expected that the day might bring to light some common challenges that communities are facing and possibly identify some ways to help communities continue to move forward.

Who attended the workshop?

The workshop was attended by approximately 35 elected officials and staff from local governments in the region. Participants included regional district directors, municipal mayors and councillors, CAOs, and planners, as well as CBT and FBC staff, guest speakers and facilitators.

What did participants want out of the workshop?

Participants were asked at the beginning of the day what their expectations were for the workshop. Among the responses were the following key questions and general themes:

- Develop a better understanding of the nuts and bolts of doing a community sustainability plan.
- How can sustainability be integrated across all departments of an organization?
- Understanding of the relationship between Sustainability Plans and Official Community Plans.



- How to engage the community around sustainability planning?
- How to make sustainability planning work in small and rural communities?
- How to work better with other communities, regionally, and with First Nations?
- Network, share ideas, and hear best practices.

Smart Planning for Practitioners: Summary of Presentations

Presentation slides are available online at:

<http://smartplanning.pcna.ca/files/Moving Sustainability Forward Nov. 3-4/>

Sustainability Planning: Starting the Conversation in Your Community

Laurie Cordell, Sustainability Facilitator, Fraser Basin Council

Laurie Cordell provided a high level overview of sustainability planning principles and approaches in context with the provincial expectations around how communities will conduct their sustainability plans. She began with the explanation that sustainability planning is “having a filter that can guide your decisions and show that sustainability is in your community’s thinking.”

Ms. Cordell explained there is no one definition of sustainability or sustainability planning or a specific process to undertake; rather communities must find the way that works best for them. She offered numerous examples of frameworks for sustainability planning and explained that for Gas Tax Program purposes communities do not have to follow a specific format or framework but rather ensure the process is tailored to their individual communities.

[Sustainability planning] can mean looking at the way you do business through a new filter by incorporating sustainability into the thinking, investing, decision-making and implementation of existing plans and operations.

Ms. Cordell also outlined some key examples of ways to get started and strategies to gain community support:

- Commit to becoming a sustainable community with a Council Resolution;
- Set up a working group or advisory board;
- Identify and cultivate “champions” to lead the process;
- Consider doing a community assessment or community workshop; and
- Ensure quick wins.



Planning for People: **Dawson Creek's Experience**

Emanuel Machado, Director of Corporate Planning and Sustainable Community Development, City of Dawson Creek

Emanuel Machado spoke about the key elements of Dawson Creek's experience with sustainability planning being Vision, Leadership and Communication as they followed through four steps:

- Determining a vision and framework;
- Establishing a baseline of information for areas of focus;
- Developing strategies and actions; and
- Selecting indicators and a process for monitoring.

Mr. Machado highlighted some key success factors from Dawson Creek's experience:

- Not losing sight of the positive;
- Getting balanced input; and
- Recognizing where regional collaboration is required and taking steps to incorporate regional thinking.

When asked by the audience for an example of their most successful public engagement, Mr. Machado spoke of engaging with youth-at-risk to plan the skate park. These positive experiences for the youth led them to be involved in other community consultations. Mr. Machado emphasized the value of engaging the community in unorthodox ways, like at fall fairs and concerts.

You have to know your community. Get to know chambers, rotaries, etc. - the groups that have roles that affect the community and engage them by meeting them where they're at.

Visions to Actions: Rossland's Experience

Kelvin Saldern, Chair of Rossland's Sustainability Commission

Kelvin Saldern presented the process Rossland undertook in creating their sustainability plan. He emphasized the important role community engagement played throughout each step of the process. Some highlights from Rossland's community engagement included:

- Creating a sustainability task force of 53 community "champions";
- Targeting outreach to specific audiences that were key to the process, such as youth, seniors and developers; and
- Using creative engagement strategies, such as kitchen table meetings, art, writing, discussion groups, and public events with hundreds of people participating.

Mr. Saldern spoke of some of the challenges that Rossland experienced, including:

- Finding consultants that match community needs and resources;
- Sustaining excitement in the community to last through the process;
- Regional integration; and
- Accepting the limitations of a small community dealing with global forces.

Establishing a common language and understanding within the community of the desired future was key.



With the “Visions to Actions” sustainability plan in place, Rossland is now able to put an emphasis on implementation and action; with contributing factors being:

- Ongoing Council support;
- Ongoing commitment of the sustainability commission, with ability to make recommendations to Council, undertake work themselves, and monitor and evaluate progress; and
- An OCP that is built around the goals of the sustainability plan.

Building Capacity and Collaboration: Regional Resilience, Reason and Respect *Kevin Damaskie, Whistler2020 Coordinator, Whistler Centre for Sustainability*

Sustainability Planning requires a shift from balanced to managed trade-offs.

Kevin Damaskie shared Whistler’s experience with using the Natural Step planning process to imagine what a sustainable future would look like in Whistler, and to identify areas and steps required now to reach that goal. “Whistler 2020” was the resulting sustainability plan that includes 17 priority areas ranging from water to food to visitor experience. Each priority area has a task force which collectively includes 180 citizens annually.

Mr. Damaskie emphasized some keys to the ongoing success of the initiative:

- Establishing a common language and keying in on commonalities;
- Council leadership in adopting Whistler 2020 as the highest level policy;
- Urban/ rural collaboration was recognized early in the process and regional players have remained involved in the process; and
- Sustaining broad community engagement not only at the front of the process, but also through implementation.

Innovative Local Engagement Strategies: **Golden’s Experience** *Lisa Reinders, Manager of Leisure Service, Town of Golden*

Lisa Reinders spoke of Golden’s creative ways of engaging the public through the Town’s OCP revision process. Golden’s engagement reached over 1000 residents through the excitement they created in the community.

Ms. Reinders emphasized some key success factors in engaging Golden:

- Being able to hire two college students to lead the engagement process;
- Establishing a diverse steering committee that ranged from ages 12-80;
- Seeking feedback from residents at events they were likely to attend, such as coffee klatches, jam night, grocery store tables, events in schools, and a public skate; and
- Continuing to engage the community beyond creating the OCP, in subsequent efforts and projects.

“I am very happy to make this town better for everyone in this community no matter what their age.”

Zachary McClean, age 12,
in a letter applying to be a “destiny designer” for Golden’s OCP.



Smart Planning for Practitioners: Themes from PARTICIPANTS' INPUT

Interactive session summaries

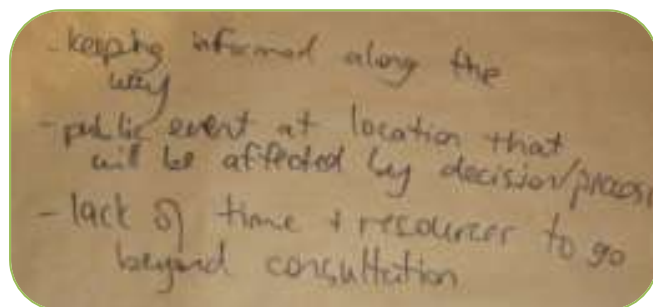
Participants engaged in two exercises to discuss several questions about creating a planning process that would work for their community. The exercises encouraged participants to think about the ideas, lessons and examples shared by the presenters from other communities, as well as explore the successes, resources and realities that prevail in their own communities. By combining the two, participants were challenged to work through elements of sustainability planning that would appreciate that every community is unique.

Each small group had a facilitator who reported key ideas and themes back to the full plenary after the completion of the exercises. The following is a summary of the responses.

Exercise A: In the first exercise, participants were asked to apply and build on the strengths and successes of their community to help guide sustainability planning.

Discussion centred on the following:

- Community engagement needs to bring out community vibrancy: be creative and fun, open to all ideas, meet people and groups “where they’re at” and build trust and dialogue;
- Importance of knowing the community’s culture to get buy-in from citizens;
- Importance of implementation and communicating outcomes back to the community in order to validate their participation; and
- Importance of local government leadership, community champions and use of advisory groups.



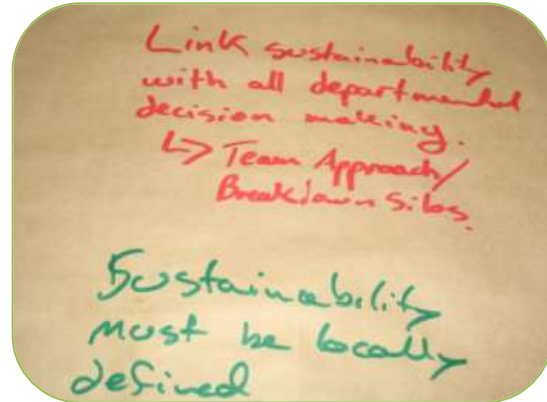
Exercise B: In the second exercise, participants were asked to think about applying “best practices” from other communities to their own sustainability planning process and discuss what existing resources they would have to utilize and/or what adaptations or additional resources might be necessary to make them work.

Themes from this discussion included:

- Finding strategies/tools to share information regionally;
- Acknowledging differences between municipalities and regional districts, but finding ways to support regional collaboration;
- Having capacity to engage the community around sustainability;
- Having capacity to follow through with implementation to not lose community credibility;
- Difficulty in finding quality consultants that can match a community’s personality and needs;
- Importance of leadership and maintaining that through successive terms for elected officials;
- Needing to have sustainability integrated across departments in a local government and across community issues;



- Finding areas of interest to your community and using these to stimulate discussion;
- Recognizing both the uniqueness of communities and similarities; and
- Needing access to accurate information.



Thoughts for food

Before heading into a break or lunch, workshop participants were asked to ponder and comment on the following set of questions:

1. What questions do you need answered in order to become a champion for local sustainability planning?
2. What do you see as potential hurdles that, if overcome, would allow for a smoother process and a successful outcome?
3. What kind of support would help you overcome some of these hurdles and become sustainable communities?

Some of the responses that emerged from these questions were:

- Lack of capacity and resources to plan, implement and make change in small communities;
- How to manage negativity through the process;
- Number of planning documents – such as the Official Community Plan – that are broad; how not to duplicate them in the sustainability plan;
- The relationship between the regional district and municipality is very key to the success of any plan;
- There must be strong political will for this to occur;
- Possibility of developing a broad plan that covers all aspects of sustainability and avoids special interests so that one lens does not trump the others; and
- The need for accurate information to make good decisions about what the future may look like, which is critical for developing appropriate strategies.

Some of the supports requested included:

- Draft terms of reference for various obvious components of a sustainability plan;
- Assistance with writing grants and identifying funding sources; and
- Assistance with reaching out to a broader public within our communities using creative engagement techniques that are accessible and easy for staff and politicians.

Workshop wrap-up

The workshop finished with a final opportunity for open comments and questions. Participants felt they were leaving the workshop with:

- A sense of how other communities have been tackling sustainability planning;
- A tool kit in the form of an electronic binder (provided to each participant on a memory stick); and
- Increased networking between communities and contact information for the facilitators (CBT and FBC) who showed interest in delivering on-going support and resources.



Evaluations were positive with participants indicating they received value from the presentations, interactive sessions and reference materials. Some valuable suggestions offered were:

- Distribute this information to a broader audience;
- Provide follow-up sessions to delve into greater detail and to share progress in our communities; and
- Regular short sessions (online or by webinar) may be useful to keep people engaged and to expand learning at a more in depth level.

Smart Planning for Practitioners: Conclusions and Next Steps

An obvious theme from both the presentations and participants' dialogue at the workshop revolved around the need for, and challenge in creatively engaging communities.

For the next six months starting in January 2010, Sara Davis, who is completing a Master in Public Administration at the University of Victoria, will be undertaking a project focusing on "creative tools to engage citizens in sustainability planning". Sara has been hired by CBT; both CBT, through Sabrina Curtis, and FBC, through Laurie Cordell, will serve as advisors to Sara's project. Sara will research and make recommendations on creating a resource for communities around creative engagement. The outcome of the project will satisfy Sara's academic requirements to complete her Master's, as well as advance CBT and FBC's attention to this expressed need.

The project will use sustainability planning as a starting point, but aims to have an end product that could have benefit for a broad range of community engagement processes. The project team is committed to providing a resource that recognizes community uniqueness and varying capacities. The project will also highlight good practices used elsewhere and will engage local representatives to understand the specific challenges they face and the type of resource that would be useful to them in the context of their work and their community.

If you have any follow-up questions from the workshop or are interested in participating in the project moving forward, please contact us. We look forward to continuing to work with you in *Moving Sustainability Forward*.

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