

District of Sparwood Community Sustainability Plan Summary

Vision of a Sustainable Community:

“Honouring our heritage and actively creating a sustainable future.

Sparwood is a vibrant and active community nestled at the heart of the Elk Valley in the Canadian Rockies, dedicated to encompassing our heritage and creating a healthy future through environmental, cultural and economic principles.”



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Overview

Recent concern with the use of resources has made all of us more interested in sustainability. While the term sustainability is often used in reference to issues of the environment and development, the concept is much larger. With increasing awareness of sustainability, business, municipalities, and other levels of government are becoming involved in sustainability initiatives that go beyond a simple concern for the environment.

The completion of the District of Sparwood Community Sustainability Plan shows that the District is committed to making the best use of all resources – not just environmental, but also social, cultural, economic, and governance. By working towards sustainability, Sparwood will balance all of these aspects to create an inclusive and well balanced community that is able to meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the needs of future generations.

The Community Sustainability Plan (CSP) will act as an overarching planning guide for the District, helping the Council, staff, and administration plan for the future in the short, medium, and long term. However, the CSP is not just for District staff. It is available for any number of groups in the Sparwood area to use. For example, it can be used by:

- A household making decisions based on the actions identified in the CSP
- An organization using the CSP as a guide may take on a specific action item
- A school developing student programs that support the direction of the CSP
- A local business using the CSP to make decisions to reduce their packaging of goods

Both the District and Sparwood residents can assist in creating a sustainable community. As part of the CSP, a resource library was established. These resources provide additional information on various sustainability processes, and ways in which people can promote sustainability in their everyday lives. Materials are available at the library, municipal hall, the rec. centre, and online at the District of Sparwood website.

"The starting point for a better world is the belief that it is possible."

-Norman Cousins

Even seemingly small actions can have a large impact. With some basic information on sustainability, significant benefits on a number of levels can be realized. For example, through the CSP process, it was revealed that the Public Works Department expends time and resources repairing sidewalks. The reason for the repair is simple – some residents dig a trench along the sidewalk that fills with water when watering their lawns. The bedding material under the sidewalk becomes saturated and, in the fall, freezes and heaves. The sidewalk then cracks and requires a repair.

Education encourages homeowners to, without a trench, let the water run across the sidewalk. Thus repairs are avoided. If the same home owner was convinced that their lawn didn't need so much water, less water would be distributed and used, and less storm water/contaminants would reach the Elk River. This small initiative has impressive implications when multiple home owners learn more about sustainability.

What follows is an overview of sustainability, a summary of the processes used to create the CSP, the sustainability action items that the District is putting in place, and how the plan will be implemented and monitored.

What is Sustainability?

Increased discussion of both environmental problems and potential solutions has resulted in more talk about sustainability. But what is sustainability? It is defined as a process, which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Sustainability is a multifaceted concept based on the five pillars of sustainability. The social, cultural, environmental, economic and governance pillars of sustainability are essential to the CSP process. A community that successfully balances these items is one where people want to live, work, and play. Below is a breakdown of each of the pillars of sustainability.

Social: This pillar includes the development of social and community services, recognition of the historical and cultural context of the community, the opportunity to develop safe inclusive neighbourhoods, housing, and recreational activities to meet a range of demographic and economic markets.

Cultural: A culturally sustainable community is vibrant and festive, promotes cultural expression, encourages a variety of art forms, and has a strong sense of heritage and pride.

Environmental: An environmentally sustainable community strives to achieve a quality natural and built environment that will protect and improve supporting natural systems and energy efficiency. This is achieved through well designed municipal planning, user friendly public places, green space, paths, biodiversity, and mixed-use durable buildings.

Economic: Sustainability in the economic dimension includes a diverse set of jobs and training opportunities, policies and programs for attracting investment and employment, promoting local entrepreneurship and business retention, and encouraging business links in the wider economy.

Governance: The governance dimension of a sustainable community includes strong, informed and effective leadership, inclusive partnerships with the community, instilling a sense of civic pride, responsibility and values, and ensuring the continuous improvement of the community through effective delivery of programs and services, monitoring, and feedback at all levels.

How Does the Sustainability Process Work?

Only recently have governments become more involved in promoting sustainability. Through *The New Deal for Cities and Communities*, the federal government encourages the creation of a Community Sustainability Assessment with funding from the Federal Gas Tax.

The District of Sparwood received \$5,000 in funding towards the creation of a Community Sustainability Assessment. This assessment was part of the preparation for the Community Sustainability Plan (CSP).

With the CSP completed, the District of Sparwood can now apply for millions of dollars of funding from the federal government. This money will help in implementing sustainability action items that are environmentally sustainable infrastructure. Eligible projects include developing public transit, water, wastewater and solid waste projects, community energy systems, and community capacity buildings.

The Community Sustainability Assessment Process

The Community Sustainability Assessment is designed to create a profile of sorts for a particular community. The assessment template uses Smart Planning, and encourages the participants to examine their community on a number of different levels.

With a dedicated group of volunteers forming the Community Sustainability Initiatives Committee representing the diverse nature of Sparwood's population, the District of Sparwood and consultant AECOM worked through the Community Sustainability Assessment Template. The committee examined what makes Sparwood unique, looked at the priority areas for change, the capacity available to make these plans a reality, then looked at the next steps for implementing this change.



The Initiatives Committee found that Sparwood has a strong but resourced based economy. A desire to diversify and strengthen the economy was expressed. They also noted that Sparwood has significant potential for growth as it has a great sense of community, a low crime rate, low taxes, and a range of recreational resources.

Part of the process involved interviewing various district staff to discuss initiatives in their respective departments that could be considered sustainable. A review of the District's policies also took place to look for sustainability policies. Both the interviews and the policy review showed that many sustainability initiatives are in place – although they are not classified as such. While many initiatives are in place, greater integration of policies is still possible.

The interview and policy review results were given to the Initiatives Committee to assist in the process of working through the template. An education on sustainability was also given to the Initiatives Community to further help in creating a common understanding of the concept of sustainability.

Following the completion of the Community Sustainability Assessment Template, the Initiatives Committee recommended the preparation of a Community Sustainability Plan. With many members of the committee willing to assist with the CSP, and additional resources in place, the District of Sparwood Council decided to prepare a CSP. The CSP was prepared using Sparwood's 2009 Gas Tax funding from the federal government.

The Community Sustainability Plan Process

The consultant AECOM used portions of Smart Planning, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) process, and The Natural Step (TNS) process to create a CSP process unique to Sparwood that would help create Sparwood's sustainable future. The next sections provide a brief description of the AUMA and TNS processes, and further details on Sparwood's CSP process.

The AUMA Process

The well respected Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) process was used because of its comprehensive long term program, and use of the five pillars of sustainability. The social, cultural, environmental, economic, and governance pillars must balance to create a sustainable community. The phases of the AUMA process are as follows:

- Phase I: Structuring the Planning Process
- Phase II: Creating a Shared Understanding of Sustainable Community Success
- Phase III: Determining and Analyzing Issues to Community Success
- Phase IV: Identify Initiatives to Move from Current Reality towards Success
- Phase V: Ongoing Monitoring and Implementation

The Natural Step

The Natural Step (TNS) is a science based decision making tool that allows for complex decision making, and can incorporate other approaches to sustainability. Education is an important part of the TNS as it aims to make sustainability easier to understand and implement. The framework creates a common perspective and language for sustainability. It also focuses on finding common ground between parties with very different interests.

TNS examines causes of our un-sustainability and the problem of decreasing resources and increasing demand for those resources. It also uses backcasting; a process in which a positive, sustainable future is envisioned, then action items are created in order to make this vision a reality. These tools help make the process of obtaining sustainability much easier to measure, assess, and understand.

Sparwood's Community Sustainability Plan Process

The process of creating Sparwood's Community Sustainability Plan combined parts of the AUMA and TNS processes. The Community Sustainability Assessment formed a part of the CSP, in particular the creation of a sustainability vision for Sparwood.

For the CSP, the Sustainability Advisory Committee was made up of many of the same people who were on the Initiatives Committee for the Sustainability Assessment. This new committee were asked to describe their idea of a future sustainable Sparwood. What will a sustainable Sparwood look like in 20 years?

The Committee created a vision for Sparwood that is as follows:

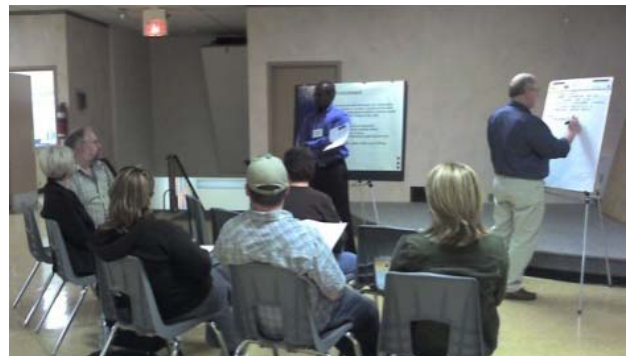
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The Advisory Committee's responses, or description of success, were given for each pillar of sustainability. For example, they envisioned a safe inclusive community, an expansion of the pathway network, and continued promotion of arts and culture in Sparwood.

At the public open house held on May 6, 2009, members of the public, District staff and Council members were given an overview of sustainability, and the process used for the Sparwood CSP.

Everyone split up into groups led by AECOM consultants to brainstorm action items that would help Sparwood achieve the descriptions of success as outlined by the Advisory Committee.



AECOM consultants Maina Waiguru (left) and Hugh MacKenzie lead a group at the public open house.

Following the meeting, the Advisory Committee refined these action items, and removed duplicate items. Each action item was assigned a timeline (when to act upon each initiative). Items will be acted upon in the following periods: 2010, 2010-2015, 2015-2025, and 2025+. Some action items are ongoing. Many of the action items will be addressed over multiple time periods.

AECOM then grouped the action items in terms of similar aspects, like Health and Social, Arts, Culture and Heritage, Economic Development etc. From this information, a 2010 Action Plan was created. Yearly plans will follow, to make sure that the action items are being implemented.

Action Plan

Below is a table containing the Action Items to be implemented in 2010. For the complete list of action items already being implemented and those to be implemented from 2010 to 2025+, please refer to the CSP.

2010 Action Items
Health and Social
Encourage more interaction between seniors and youth to bridge /understand generation gaps i.e. gardening and weeding programs, luncheons, soap box derby, reading programs at library, baking.
Provide opportunities that bring and mix people together, i.e. bring various groups together to an open house.
Hold “ethnic nights” to showcase various cultures/ traditions on a regular, progressive basis.
Hold summer festivals in the field outside the high school.
Continue the bike rodeo.
Bring police dog into school to educate students/ Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE).
Encourage and thank police for their efforts in community policing.
Continue to design programs to accommodate shift work schedule.
Continue utilizing the amazing social network, ie. encourage neighbours to get to know their neighbours.
Adopt a park/neighbourhood to encourage the residents to take pride in their community.
Encourage youth mentoring, i.e. look at involving youth on committees such as the Advisory Committee
Encourage different food choices through special events, i.e. ethnic food, vegetarian, by heritage groups and cooking classes.
Arts/culture/heritage
Conduct regular, scheduled clean-up of the Titan truck site and provide a cigarette disposal bin. (Chamber)
Keep arts and culture week going
Support small networks of activities i.e. Elk Valley Dirt Riders.
Develop, expand and share/communicate a list of opportunities that enrich experiences.
Support/promote informal groups by advertising events and activities.
Offer more cultural opportunities (i.e. theatre group)
Promote More music/art events such as jam nights, poetry etc.
Recreation and leisure
Construct more trails and incorporate more information such as the difficulty and length, maps, define according to trail types, and interpretive signage.
Provide more pathway linkages to provide access to landscaped and restored areas, and selectively remove trees to open up certain areas.
Enforce bylaws to protect non-motorized recreational users of multi season pathways.

2010 Action Items
Regulate fishing and hunting activities by limiting access to certain areas to maintain this activity at a small scale.
Encourage photography as a means to increase interest in outdoor recreation.
Encourage/ enhance existing sport mentorship program to encourage residents and others to participate in outdoor recreation, and fishing and hunting.
Provide a course to teach the basics of outdoor survival.
Promote the historical walking tour and update and expand walking tour including repainting footsteps.
Economic development
Retain the hanging basket program.
Create a solution to encourage businesses downtown. Draw visitors and residents through/past the mall to Centennial Square. Currently the mall blocks the downtown
Promote Sparwood as a family oriented day trip type destination (not a resort like Fernie).
Attract people to Sparwood and engage/encourage them to remain here.
Organize fun events in town to support small business.
Coordinate and co-market an inter-community business network in Elk Valley to encourage variety and reduce repetition.
Continue competitions between businesses using contests, i.e. make pedometers available as a tool to generate competition.
Promote activities/businesses in the downtown to visitors by using the walking tour and other similar programs.
Encourage a craft fair downtown and/or a farmers market.
Advertise locally to request input for business opportunities.
Restore Murals – find a new person to become involved.
Natural areas
Encourage more landscaping along the highway corridor or implement other measures to enhance and stand out as a gateway community to BC.
Plant trees to screen industrial sites and selectively remove trees to enhance views of Sparwood's commercial areas and the Titan truck.
Conduct regular scheduled maintenance of all District green belts and small grassed corners that are neglected.
As a part of an afforestation plan and to replace trees removed, naturalize the area between the campground and the highway to act as a sound barrier.
Create landscape restoration plans for logged areas.
Transportation
Put a carpool/ ride share forum on the district website.
Facilitate the culture of caring to help those with limited mobility by carpooling share/ride into major centres for appointments.
Learning
Educate about water conservation i.e. rain barrels, etc.
Continue to promote and educate the community regarding local bussing.
Encourage/educate regarding biking and walking by conducting workshops, and providing information packages.

2010 Action Items
Encourage organic food production with education and workshops.
Establish/encourage programs to educate residents about food conservation i.e. Senior's teaching residents how to can, preserve and winter food storage.
Provide programs to educate and inform the public about afforestation practices and pine beetle management.
Better inform residents about fibre optic opportunities and build on and utilize fibre optics as opportunities arise.
Promote the internet and video conferencing to provide learning opportunities to the community, i.e. specialty physicians.
Provide incentive education programs to improve energy efficiency in existing residences and buildings.
Governance and partnerships
Expand planning policies to include legal suites.
Become a success in sustainability management
Do not chlorinate water.
Materials and solid waste
Develop a larger take it - leave it area at the transfer station and communicate its use to the public. Leave items for a longer period of time to provide ample opportunity for resident perusal.
Volunteerism
Encourage young people to join adult clubs to revitalize membership and volunteer base.
Provide central place for sign-up for volunteers.
Encourage volunteers to promote a Heritage week.
Communication
Provide better communication of events in town through a newsletter, signage - advertise where the people gather.
Continue collaboration of sports associations within the region.
Support the development of Sparwood's own newspaper.
Increase communications with corporations by inviting their participation on committees, by encouraging their participation in events, by the Mayor and management inviting corporations to visit the community and potentially sponsor events and activities.
Improve website and newsletters - the current layout is hard to navigate, i.e. the community calendar.
Improve communications by increasing readership of the website by providing updates, events and prizes and by circulating newsletters (the Black Rock newspaper) and the recreation brochure; and by creating e-mail lists for circulation.
Educate the public more, i.e. creation of a new town website with a blog for sharing information that's separate from the municipality website.

Implementation and Monitoring Progress

The Community Sustainability Plan has been adopted by Council and is now being implemented. Each year, the document will be modified via addendums to show the updated yearly action plans. A long term review

of the vision and descriptions of success is to take place every five years. This will ensure that Sparwood is on track to achieve sustainability in the next 20 years.

Members of the Advisory Committee will be responsible for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the action items each year. They will report to Council, describe successes, and note where more resources are needed. Means will be developed to ensure the public is informed regarding implementation on a yearly basis.

The CSP contains recommendations on the implementation of the various sustainability measures and suggests a schedule for planning the yearly action items, creating a budget, and providing this information to the public.

Planning and Development staff and the Advisory Committee will measure the success of the implementation of sustainability action items with various tools as illustrated in the CSP. However, the process is flexible and subject to change as needed.

Conclusion

A Community Sustainability Plan is an excellent planning tool and resource for the entire community to use. Constantly being modified, a CSP is an effective tool for creating a sustainable community in many different ways, namely the social, cultural, environmental, economic, and governance aspects. With this CSP, Sparwood will further develop to its true potential.