

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

The Vision. The Reality. The Need.

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100 LEMARCHANT ROAD | ST. JOHN'S NL | CANADA | A1C 5K4
T. {709} 738-2500 | F. {709} 738-2499 | INFO@TRACT.NF.NET
TRACTCONSULTING.COM



THANK YOU

for downloading this white paper
on Community Planning.

If you would like to learn more about
how your community can benefit from
sustainable planning, please contact
Neil Dawe at Tract Consulting Inc.

A handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read "Neil Dawe".

NEIL DAWE, PRESIDENT

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SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

INTRODUCTION

- Sustainable land use planning represents the emerging approach for many local governments throughout the world to manage change. It is more than an overused buzzword.
- Sustainable planning raises the consciousness of a new way to consider the environmental, economic, social and cultural challenges and opportunities, and the future form and function, of our communities.
- In NL, sustainable land use planning at the municipal level has not gained a foothold.
- The presenters are of the view that both rural and urban municipalities in the Province need to shift gears and focus on a more sustainable land use planning governance model.
- Discussion Content:
 - *What is Sustainable Land Use Planning?*
 - *What is Current State of Land Use Planning in NL?*
 - *What are the Potential Next Steps to Pursue?*

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

PART ONE:

INTENT OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PLANNING

- To manage future change in a more comprehensive, integrated and inclusive manner.
- To look beyond the short term to the longer range future.
- To balance the natural and built physical environments of a community with local economic assets and social/ cultural considerations, challenges and opportunities.
- To positively effect the design, function, prosperity and livability of our communities.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

WHAT SUSTAINABILITY MAY ALSO REPRESENT

- Sustainability is an emerging land use concept that is being refined and expanded in its scope, and applied globally to help improve the quality of life in communities.
- The range of community sustainability concepts being pursued throughout the world is diverse. Sustainability initiatives may focus on climate change or providing for a safe drinking water supply or adopting approaches to reduce GHG emissions or pursuing green building technologies such as energy efficient LEEDS certified structures, promoting urban agriculture initiatives or providing housing for the homeless and generally making communities more livable.
- The common denominator of sustainability is that it needs to hit the street at the local community level.
- The overall goal is for communities to become more complete and self-sustaining.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

HOW CAN SUSTAINABLE PLANNING HELP MANAGE COMMUNITIES?

- Develop ways to use resources of land, water and energy more wisely.
- Preserve and better protect what is valued.
- Make optimum and more economically efficient use of the developable land supply.
- Pursue housing, commercial growth, employment and community amenities that are responsive to the needs of current and future residents.
- Create opportunities for enhanced community design, higher quality of life and an unique sense of place.
- Provide for active and healthy living choices.
- Include local residents in decisions that shape their future.

These seven sustainable planning concepts will be explored more fully in the discussion that follows.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

PART TWO:

USING LAND, WATER AND ENERGY RESOURCES MORE WISELY

- A key missing ingredient in the provision of effective land use planning is typically a lack of local knowledge on the dynamics of the land base.
- An initial sustainable planning objective at the local government is to prepare a comprehensive land use mapping inventory to determine:
 - *baseline community planning property information;*
 - *the location, features and acreage area amount of environmentally sensitive and recreational lands (knowing what is not developable helps to provide certainty of what is developable);*
 - *the extent, location, topography and physical size of the serviced urban area;*
 - *the inventory supply of vacant, serviced and non-serviced residential, commercial, and employment generating lands.*
- Acquiring an intimate knowledge of the local land supply helps to shape growth patterns in a manner that preserves environmental resources, to utilize the land base for development in the most economically efficient manner and location, to create a more efficient transportation network and to promote more conservative use of energy to sustain growth and development.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

PRESERVE AND PROTECT WHAT IS VALUED

- All too often land development externalizes costs to the natural environment.
- Unmanaged consumer demand and big land clearing machinery overwhelms environmental features. Once gone, it is gone.
- Slowly the benefits of the natural environment are being understood.
- Example of Britain's recent valuation of natural lands.
- Preservation of natural systems through strategies of watershed storm water management, streamside protection measures, tree retention and replanting policies, site grading requirements and identification of sensitive areas.
- Forest lands fire interface risk assessment.
- Coastal lands planning strategy.
- Archaeological, historic, heritage and cultural resources.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

ECONOMICALLY EFFICIENT USE OF THE LAND SUPPLY

- Density is good.
- Maximizing Existing Water, Sewer and Road Infrastructure Services.
- Minimize Infrastructure Extensions to Support New Growth.
- Explore Alternative Development Standards.
- Focus on Residential Infill and Intensification.
- Support Mixed Land Uses.
- Pursue Compact Land Use Patterns.
- Establish Urban Growth Boundary.
- Create Public Spaces.
- Devise Innovative Zoning Approaches to Meet Local Needs.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

HOUSING, COMMERCIAL AND COMMUNITY AMENITIES

- Understand 'Who are we planning for?'
- Example of specific planning needs in different communities.
- Be adaptive to local needs, responsive to land development constraints and pursue diverse land use opportunities and localized responses.
- Identify a range of housing, commercial growth and viable employment lands options and zone densities.
- Direct land use development to occur in specific locations of the community — high density adjacent to the downtown.
- Address short and longer term land supply needs of the community.
- Assess the community's housing affordability and servicing costs for economic growth.
- Create connective and livable neighbourhoods.
- Pursue neighbourhood commercial, and integrated parkland, recreation, pedestrian mobility and open space amenities.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

COMMUNITY DESIGN, QUALITY OF LIFE AND SENSE OF PLACE

- Develop a Community Vision and prepare Guiding Principles, Goals and Objectives to achieve the Vision.
- Understand that the way communities are designed and built will have a direct impact on the local quality of life.
- Soften the effect of hard infrastructure elements.
- Consider site/building and landscape design guidelines for higher density residential, commercial, industrial and other uses.
- Protect, preserve and accentuate the downtown commercial core as the heart of the community.
- Attract new businesses through case specific strategies.
- Pursue projects that provide a unique identity that allows a community to become distinct and as a preferred place of choice for visitors.
- Respect local history, cultural and heritage resources.
- Emphasize the benefit of public and open spaces as an integral part of the community.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIVING CHOICES

- Create policies to respond to aging of the local population.
- Consider initiatives to plan for youth.
- Create opportunities for less reliance on the automobile.
- Introduce provisions for the bicycle.
- Explore options for increased pedestrian mobility.
- Identify a community wide integrated walking system.
- Establish site design protocol that encourages pedestrian activity.
- Prepare a short and longer term parkland acquisition strategy.
- Encourage enhanced recreational programming.
- Pursue community agriculture initiatives.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

INCLUSIVE DECISIONS

- Expand the review process of development proposals beyond the desks of engineers and planners.
- Take land use planning public.
- Create community partnerships with local business groups and community organizations.
- Establish an expanded Advisory Committee Structure of Council.
- Explore residential neighbourhood associations.
- Encourage local environmental stewardship.
- Prepare and share one and three year community goals and objectives.
- Nurture ongoing dialogue with adjacent municipalities and provincial agencies and departments.

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PART THREE:

THE NL CONTEXT

- NL communities have varied land use management challenges.
- There are over 280 cities, towns and villages situated in geographically diverse locations throughout the province.
- Approximately 40 communities have a population greater than 2,000 residents.
- An estimated 25 municipalities have more than 3,000 residents.
- Avalon Region municipalities including Torbay, Paradise and others have been experiencing rapid urban growth pressures.
- More rural based Towns such as on the Northern Peninsula are struggling to survive with declining and aging populations, failing infrastructure, a dwindling economic base and high rates of local unemployment.
- Still other communities such as Grand Falls-Windsor are embracing a pro-active approach to the future and pursuing innovative planning initiatives.
- No one sustainable recipe will work for every community, but NL communities are in need of the benefits that a revised land use planning approach based upon sustainability principles, may provide.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

THE CURRENT STATUS OF SUSTAINABLE PLANNING IN NL

- Most municipalities are being planned by engineers and communities are being shaped by engineered infrastructure projects.
- There are very few trained municipal planners working for local governments outside of the St. John's area.
- Not all NL municipalities recognize the benefits of planning, particularly sustainable planning concepts.
- The sustainability aspects of the recently completed Integrated Community Sustainability Plans are sitting on the shelf.
- Municipal Plans generally contain the bare minimum required by provincial legislation.
- Economics seems to continue to trump the environment.
- Growth is viewed as the answer in most NL municipalities — considerations of environment and land use principles get in the way.
- Municipalities have a lack of knowledge and familiarity, resources and tools to pursue sustainability.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

USING LAND, WATER AND ENERGY RESOURCES MORE WISELY – THE NL CONTEXT

- There are significant gaps in available baseline property information.
- Inventory mapping of the local land supply is deficient.
- Few municipalities have a legal base map of all privately owned lands within its municipal and planning area boundaries.
- Few municipalities can afford or have immediate access to GIS mapping capability.
- Infrastructure servicing mapping records are incomplete.
- The knowledge of the community mapping most often resides with the engineering department or the municipality's engineering consultants.
- The widespread lack of mapping detail hinders NL municipalities from:
 - *pursuing a comprehensive planning approach of managing the land base;*
 - *making land use decisions with full information; and,*
 - *using land, water and energy resources more wisely.*

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

PRESERVE AND PROTECT WHAT IS VALUED — THE NL CONTEXT

- Environmentally Sensitive Areas are not comprehensively identified at the local government level.
- There are few municipal environmental planners in NL.
- There appears to be a disjoint of communication between NL communities and sustainable environmental direction from the Province and DFO.
- If implemented, environmental management primarily pertains to applying cook-book land development setbacks to watercourses.
- There is a near absence of local government environmental planning initiatives such as a watershed management approach to land development, tree retention and replanting policies or bylaws, innovative stormwater management, GHG emission reduction strategies, minimization of impermeable surfaces on development sites or natural open space acquisition strategies.
- Where environmental success has been achieved, it is typically through the commitment of local stewardship groups.
- As a result, protection and preservation of the natural environment is not being comprehensively applied.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

ECONOMICALLY EFFICIENT USE OF THE LAND SUPPLY — THE NL CONTEXT

- Outside of St. John's, most land development is focused on single family residential subdivisions and commercial projects with little consideration to sustainable site design.
- Land development patterns seem linked to the historical past — the way things have always been done.
- It is not uncommon to see fully serviced large lot residential projects located detached and sprawling from the urban core.
- Higher density uses of townhouses, condominiums and apartments seem to be a feared housing form — design management is left to the developer.
- Few municipalities have adopted an urban infill strategy for growth.
- Little evidence of innovative planning projects such as cluster residential or compact lot projects that make maximum use of the land base.
- As a result, most land development is not as cost effective as what is possible and preferred from a sustainable perspective.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

HOUSING, COMMERCIAL AND COMMUNITY AMENITIES — THE NL CONTEXT

- Municipal growth is most often being driven by developers — what comes in the door is typically what is being built.
- Community growth is generally not being directed to planned areas of the municipality but rather to lands selected by developers.
- Land development is not occurring in a comprehensive fashion — the trend is piecemeal development that incrementally results in degradation of environmental lands, loss of treed and viewscape areas, inefficient traffic patterns and loss of community character.
- Local governments are not responding in a timely fashion to addressing housing needs for seniors, housing affordability, provision of park space, downtown area improvements and amenities such as alternative mobility considerations and unique public spaces.
- Commercial growth lacks site design and aesthetic appeal.
- Employment growth is not always focused on a community's strengths.
- Cumulative poorly planned and developed sites results in community strain and loss of character.
- Community growth is not achieving a standard that is as cost effective, environmentally responsible and responsive to community needs.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

COMMUNITY DESIGN, QUALITY OF LIFE AND SENSE OF PLACE — THE NL CONTEXT

- Many NL communities are struggling to survive — attaining stability is their short term goal.
- Attention to economic and employment problems, the cost of aging infrastructure and other community obstacles are draining their energies.
- Local governments are not embracing a long range vision for the future of their communities, and are not focusing on their strengths and assets.
- Inadequate attention is directed to the site design, layout, form and function of new land developments when they do occur.
- Few Municipal Planning strategies provide attention to the soft infrastructure elements of sustainable planning that can help to improve the appearance and function of land development sites, to enhance community character, to provide for a higher local quality of life for residents and result in increased community pride.
- The unique sense of place of NL communities is being eroded.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIVING CHOICES – THE NL CONTEXT

- Land development patterns continue to focus on the automobile.
- Provision for parkland, integrated community walking trails, and bicycle route planning are not dominant considerations in how communities are being developed.
- Development is occurring without attention to the pedestrian.
- Many communities do not have a comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- Few communities have developed a long term parkland acquisition strategy.
- Encouragement for urban agriculture is most often absent in land use planning documents.
- As a result, we are not pursuing community growth in a manner that will achieve active and healthy living choices for local residents.

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INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE — THE NL CONTEXT

- Many decisions at the local government level are being made in isolation.
- Regional governance structures appear to lack teeth.
- Inter-local government cooperation seems to be isolated to one-off issues.
- Few municipalities prepare annual goals and objectives, and fewer adopt a goals and objectives format beyond a one year period.
- Capital financial plans and budgets need to look beyond a one year timeframe to anticipated expenditures required over the longer term of five to fifteen years.
- Community partnerships with downtown businesses, the local chamber of commerce, service clubs, neighbourhood residential associations and environmental stewardship groups are not common place.
- The opportunity for local residents to serve on varied Advisory Committees of Council is rare.
- Sustainable success at the local community level will ultimately come from within, from the skills, strengths and commitment of local residents. This formula for the future is not being nurtured by Town Councils.
- Few elected representatives walk the talk of sustainability.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

PART FOUR:

CASE STUDY EXAMPLES OF SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

- Calgary's 100 year sustainable vision — Alberta.
- Ucluelet's use of smart growth principles — British Columbia.
- Courtenay's sustainability checklist for land use development applications — British Columbia.
- Maple Ridge development design guidelines — British Columbia.
- New Greenbelt Plan that identifies where not to develop — Ontario.
- Sustainability and Prosperity Act — Nova Scotia.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

PART FIVE:

HOW DO WE MOVE TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE?

- Four primary implementation instruments: Regulatory, Policy, Economic and Participatory.

REGULATORY:

- NL Government commitment to and support for an enhanced land use planning approach.
- Legislative changes to adopt a more sustainable direction for local government land use planning within the Urban and Rural Planning Act based upon the following principles:
 1. *Balance between the interests of citizens, local governments and the provincial government.*
 2. *Clear, simple and understandable legislation and related administrative procedures.*
 3. *Flexibility to respond practically to specific local needs and circumstances.*
 4. *Creating a legislative mechanism to implement sustainable land use plans through consultation, collaboration and adoption.*
- In the short term, amend the Urban and Rural Planning Act to expand the required content of Municipal Plans to include many of the items currently listed under the permissive content.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

HOW DO WE MOVE TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE?

(CONTINUED)

POLICY:

- Tools to assist Local Governments to assume the role of fulfilling the sustainability mandate of new legislation.
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs expanded role in working with local governments, including creation of a provincial sustainability office and coordinator.
- Other provincial ministries increased advisory involvement with sustainable land use planning.
- Creation of community sustainability workbooks.
- Preparation of community sustainability checklists.
- Assistance to communities for preparing sustainable community plans and implementation strategies.
- Development of community based sustainability targets to measure success.
- Encouragement and support for community sustainable planning initiatives.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

HOW DO WE MOVE TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE?

(CONTINUED)

ECONOMIC:

- Matching provincial resources to enable increased local government responsibilities.
- Commitment to funding programs for local governments to pursue sustainability.
- Cost sharing on specific sustainable projects.
- Identification of priority sustainable planning initiatives for funding.
- Exploration of eligible sustainable planning funding from Gas Tax revenue.
- Financial tracking procedures for sustainable projects.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

HOW DO WE MOVE TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE?

(CONTINUED)

PARTICIPATORY:

- Provide increased roles and responsibilities to local governments to implement sustainable land use planning.
- Formulate incentives for local government to change behaviours towards sustainability.
- Establish a voluntary sustainability code of practice between the Province and local governments.
- Encourage expanded local representation on Advisory Committees of Council and support establishment of local residential neighbourhood and business organizations as a voice in local decision making.
- Create Champions of Sustainability.

SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR NL MUNICIPALITIES

PART SIX:

SUMMATION

The discussion on sustainability is not about a quick fix. It is more about a paradigm shift in the way we currently plan and manage our resources and our communities. Sustainable land use planning is a long term strategy — think 10 and 20 and 30 years.

To pursue sustainability requires commitment and support.

Within the shorter term, we can begin to map our communities and get to know the land base better, and begin to prepare municipal plans and land development regulations that will more comprehensively preserve our environmental assets, and utilize the remaining developable land area in a manner that is more economically efficient, provide for an enhanced community form and function, and develop a more physically attractive, livable and stronger community.

Over the longer term, sustainable land use planning will ensure that NL remains a very special place — it deserves the benefits of what sustainability may provide.