
A Policy Agenda for Canadian Municipalities

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Introduction

A joint-partnership between the Royal Roads University Canada Research Chair on Sustainable Community Development (CRC) and Sustainable Solutions Group (SSG), this policy agenda for the implementation of sustainable development at the municipal level is the latest outcome from the CRC's [research continuum](#).

This municipal action agenda is derived from a sustainable cities strategic review, including case studies of international best practices, with an analysis of these cases towards their potential applicability and adaptation to Canadian contexts. Six cities were reviewed in the case studies: Copenhagen, Sydney, Portland, Växjö, Malmö and London. Research and analysis for the international case studies included extensive interviews with key officials from each of these cities.

This project brought together an advisory group of municipal decision-makers, practitioners, planners and researchers from 20 Canadian municipalities and organizations. Through a series of e-Dialogues (virtual real-time meetings), this group examined barriers to sustainable development experienced in their municipalities, considered the potential relevance of achievements made in the six international case studies, and explored concrete solutions and actions that could be implemented in Canadian communities.

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A strong argument for reducing GHG emissions and a reliance on fossil fuels, is the European Union's calculation that under its current policy of reducing its use of fossil fuels, it currently saves € 100 billion (approximately \$140.1 Cdn) per year from reduced fuel costs and, by 2050, it will realize benefits of € 320 billion (approximately \$448.4 Cdn) per year.

There are two key agenda items we wish to highlight. First, **clear multi-level governance arrangements** must be in place to ensure that all key actors sit around the same table to articulate a clear vision for their community, the outcomes-based strategies and plans to implement the vision, a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of each actor in implementing the vision, the specific policy/regulatory/fiscal tools each will bring to the table and a robust accountability and reporting arrangement to monitor progress, adjust planning and keep citizens engaged. Second, **data**, everything from baseline information on the starting points (environmental and other) describing where the municipality is in terms of sustainable

development performance, to performance indicators and metrics of success to measure progress toward strategic outcomes. Key to data relevance is comparability. In Canada and elsewhere, this is the real challenge, but it is also critical to enabling municipalities to engage effectively in the virtuous cycles: each municipality needs to be able to compare itself to see what works where and why.

Canadian municipalities do not have access to the significant financial resources seen in a number of the case studies (eg., Copenhagen, Malmö, and Växjö), and may relate more closely to the Sydney and Portland case studies. Canadian municipalities can, however, adopt, adapt, and prioritize a number of the best practices seen across the case studies to further the implementation of sustainable development in a systematic and concrete, step-wise fashion in their own communities.

1. Adopt a systems-wide, integrated approach to sustainable development planning.
 - integrate individual municipal plans (Official Community Plans, Integrated Community Sustainability Plans) into one overarching municipal sustainability plan;
 - link the implementation of these plans to political electoral cycles;
 - integrate sustainable development thinking into municipal policy and decision-making across all departments;
 - support collaboration and integrated decision making between departments and the greater community through the development of horizontal working collaboratives;
 - understand interdependencies and integrate them into municipal sustainable development planning;
 - conduct gap analyses, align existing policies, and ensure policy coherence to the sustainable development plan;
 - use legislative frameworks (regulations, bylaws, codes) with incentives to support the municipal sustainable development plan's targets and goals.

2. Reframe sustainable development in business cases, illustrating the economic benefits, as well as the ecological and the social benefits gained through sustainable development projects.
 - identify long-term cost savings in all sustainable infrastructure projects
 - integrate multiple strategies between government departments, while using one stream of funding in order to develop and implement sustainability initiatives;
 - incorporate a full cost benefits analysis to reduce future capital costs (eg. sewer enlargements by encouraging projects such as eco-roofs and green streets);
 - analyze the opportunities for sustainable development initiatives to deal with the infrastructure deficit challenge.

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3. Implement quantitative and qualitative performance measurement indicators, monitor and report regularly on progress and benefits accrued.
 - benchmark GHG emissions, energy use, water use, waste consumption in municipal operations, commercial and residential use;
 - produce an annual report that outlines progress made towards sustainable development targets set by the municipality;
 - combine short-term targets (that match the electoral cycle) with longer-term indicators that extend beyond the electoral cycle;
 - develop and set requirements for the use of performance management monitoring and reporting for all plans and initiatives.
 4. Integrate on-going community engagement into municipal sustainable development planning.
 - engage diverse communities through dynamic, ongoing, iterative engagement processes, in all phases of the planning;
 - involve individuals with sustainable development expertise, researchers and practitioners through various partnerships and forums to contribute relevant knowledge and skills to the implementation;
 - compliment engagement exercises with education and information programs on the benefits of sustainable development to increase buy-in from the community and business leaders;
 - adopt new creative strategies and technologies for significant and ongoing engagement processes (eg. world cafés, pecha kucha based engagement techniques, public events, virtual engagement techniques, etc.).
 5. Facilitate partnerships and alliances for sustainable development plans and projects.
 - collaborate through private and public sector partnerships for expertise (eg. universities), investment, cost-sharing (companies), and cost-savings (neighbourhood associations, volunteer programs);
 - partner with private companies to develop energy services contracts for new construction and retrofits;
 - facilitate a network of champions from diverse sectors of the community;
 - collaborate and partner with other municipalities in joint demonstration projects, to exchange information and expertise, engage and inform the population and build synergies.
 6. Re-direct cost-savings to fund additional projects.
 - develop revolving loan funds to support green building retrofits for public and private existing buildings (for example see London's RE:NEW and RE:FIT programs);

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- shift from investing in physical infrastructure to maintaining ecosystem services: allocate funds from storm-water infrastructure budgets to plant trees, build eco roofs, bio swales, rain gardens and green streets to greatly reduce grey storm-water infrastructure costs (for example see Portland’s grey to green storm-water management initiatives);
 - build incentives for citizens to install swales and eco roofs on private properties to help reduce storm-water in the municipal sewers;
 - use cost-savings to seed environmental funds for individual homeowners’ sustainable projects (for example see the [Montreal fund](#)).

7. Leadership and Investment.

- political and official leadership is critical to stimulating new networks of social innovation, locally and regionally;
- create legal requirements to produce a number of sustainable development strategies and targets;
- model key climate risks, identify opportunities and prioritize vulnerabilities;
- redirect taxes to give municipalities more room to invest in sustainable development initiatives rather than through continuing unsustainable development;
- ensure sustainable development implementation at the local level through subsidiarity;
- foster a national network of learning and support, encouraging city officials to share successes and lessons learned;
- invest in local demonstration projects to show the tangible benefits to be gained from implementing sustainable development initiatives;
- create market incentives in the form of subsidies, tax incentives, and feed in tariffs to direct private funds towards priority areas such as renewable energy;
- federal and provincial investment in sustainable infrastructure projects and a low carbon economy is required to accelerate economic, social and ecological benefits for Canadians at large.

8. Implement integrated solutions to infrastructure provision.

- design integrated waste management systems;
- prioritize the development of district energy systems;
- invest in alternative transportation;
- prioritize the development of green storm-water management systems.

For successful Canadian community innovations, we refer you to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities [website](#).

Case Study Analysis Summary

Critical success factors are ultimately specific to the individual place and space of each city in **Copenhagen, London, Malmö, Portland, Sydney, and Växjö** involve specific processes and responses derived from local conditions. Nonetheless, these case studies do provide various lessons in community sustainable development that *are* applicable and broadly transferable across communities in Canada, regardless of scale.

The advisory group of Canadian municipal officials and researchers helped to provide a trans-disciplinary analysis of key barriers facing Canadian municipalities. The advisory team also provided policy recommendations that were informed by the best practices illustrated by the international case studies.

Barriers identified by the advisory team include:

- limited mandate or agency;
- lack of market support for some initiatives;
- required system changes and changes in people's behaviour;
- internal silos in municipal government and lack of integrated planning;
- limited capacity and resources;
- process inertia;
- lack of engagement and information at the local level (politically and by the community);
- need for sustainability leadership.

Conversely, the researchers and city officials regarded the following best practices identified in the case studies as important, in terms of implementing urban sustainable development:

- government leadership and vision;
- culture of engagement and focus on community building;
- level of investment;
- horizontal government collaboration and external partnerships;
- systems-wide perspective;
- long-term and integrated planning;
- modeling and managing risks and opportunities;
- reporting and monitoring clearly articulated targets and goals;
- municipal agency and capacity to act;
- market incentives and public/private partnerships;
- combining short-term and long-term wins with sustainable development goals;
- focus on priorities.

While **strong political support and leadership** at the national level is advantageous in developing a comprehensive community sustainable development plan, it is not essential as evidenced by the case studies (not all six cities benefitted from national-level political support). What each case study does exemplify is broad, strong, and continuing local political and

government leadership and commitment to sustainable development through community engagement and education, partnerships and alliances, and investment in a low carbon economy.

Partnerships and alliances can help to exchange information and knowledge (as seen in Malmö in developing new building design requirements with local construction companies), gain skills (such as in Växjö's partnership with the local university for modeling and performance measurement monitoring) or to gain access to funds (seen in a number of the case studies, but in particular London's innovative RE:NEW and RE:FIT programs). Partnerships can also involve joint projects with other municipalities for cost sharing (see Växjö's Eco-budget pilot project) or extending successful local demonstration projects into a network across contiguous municipalities. The most successful case studies (and in Växjö's case, the smallest city studied) sought partnerships and alliances wherever possible with local business, education systems, neighbourhood associations, etc.

Involving key stakeholders (citizens, associations, businesses, universities, etc.) in the early stages allowed for success in not only obtaining community support, but also in identifying novel ideas, energy-saving solutions, new partnerships and alliances, and ensuring that stakeholders were well informed of new policies and requirements. In the majority of the case studies, broad and on-going political commitment to community sustainable development also resulted in **long-term planning horizons**, extending beyond the electoral cycle (the city of London has legislation which requires the mayoral position to develop sustainable development plans, consequently new plans are developed if the incumbent changes).

City councils engaged their communities of local actors and leaders in developing community sustainable development plans, with **concrete targets and goals** for measuring the city's progress on sustainability. Copenhagen's sustainability goals include, by 2025, becoming the world's first carbon neutral capital and, by 2015, defining itself as the world's 'eco-metropolis'. Malmö is committed to becoming climate neutral by 2020, and, by 2030, to be based entirely on 100% renewable energy. London's mitigation strategy is to reduce CO₂ emissions by 60 per cent from 1990 levels, by 2025 and at least by 80 per cent from 1990 levels, by 2050. Portland aims to reduce its carbon emissions to 80% below 1990 levels, by the year 2050 and has an interim goal to reduce carbon emission by 40%, by 2030. The Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision has a number of strategic directions, with targets including: by 2030, the city will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent compared to 1990 levels, and by 70 per cent compared to 1990 levels, by 2050. Växjö, which promotes itself, and is generally described, as "The Greenest City in Europe" aims to be completely fossil fuel free, by 2030 at the latest. Concrete targets and goals help to focus and prioritize strategies and initiatives. The quantitative and qualitative performance indicators are monitored, and progress regularly reported to the public.

The case studies' successful sustainable development plans depend on **interdepartmental coordination and collaboration** at the municipal level; sustainable development is integrated into

every department's **policy decision-making**, and legislation and regulations, and municipal bylaws are reconciled to support the sustainable development plans.

The cities reviewed in the case studies all have plans, which include initiatives aimed at **changing the behaviour** of city residents. By acknowledging that changing people's behaviour is difficult if it involves financial sacrifice and a change in lifestyle, these cities seek ways to make it easier for residents to reduce their overall ecological footprint, while supporting overall municipal sustainability initiatives. For example, to help residents to live without fossil fuels, Växjö provides inexpensive and convenient (local) district heating, attractive public transport and good walking and cycling paths. One of Malmö's incentives is to provide free parking for electric vehicles while banning fossil fuel cars from certain areas.

Malmö, Portland, and Växjö use practical **demonstration projects** to educate and inform the population, build synergies, and to learn from and modify for improvements. E-Dialogue participants highlighted best practices such as alternative transportation, district heating, building retrofits and green stormwater infrastructure and discussed the importance of using demonstration projects to showcase the potential benefits to citizens while also building community.

Conclusion

By implementing integrated, systems-wide sustainable development initiatives with performance measurement and reporting systems, the international case study cities made concrete improvements in the social, economic, and ecological wellbeing of their communities. An analysis of these cities in collaboration with an advisory team of city officials and researchers from 20 Canadian municipalities and organizations demonstrates that many of these leading municipal sustainability initiatives are applicable to the Canadian context.

There is enormous opportunity for Canadian cities to exemplify leadership in sustainable development, while stimulating the green economy, dramatically reducing reliance on fossil fuels, creating resilient and adaptable cities and improving the overall quality of life for Canadian citizens.