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Launching the Process to Develop an Integrated
Community Sustainability Plan for
The Blue Mountains

Sustainability Training Workshops 1 & 2

Wednesday, April 8th, 2009
9:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.
The Ravenna Room
The Blue Mountain Inn

Wednesday, April 15th, 2009
1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Inn Café
The Blue Mountain Inn

FINAL REPORT

Prepared by Lura Consulting

This workshop summary was prepared by Lura Consulting. The workshop was conducted by Mike Purcell from The Natural Step as part of the development of the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan for the Blue Mountains. This summary captures the key discussion points from Training Workshop #1 held on April 8, 2009, and Training Workshop #2 held on April 15, 2009. If you have any questions or comments regarding the summary, please contact either:

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1 Introduction

The Blue Mountains is currently involved in the initial stage for the development of an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) that will serve as a guideline for the sustainable development of the town in the next 50 to 100 years. Two Sustainability training workshops were conducted to kick start the process with community stakeholders.

The purpose of the Workshops is to provide participants with:
- a shared understanding and common language of sustainability and reasons to embark upon an ICSP
- stories and examples of how other communities, businesses and organizations are engaging and advancing towards sustainability
- an overview of the proposed process for The Blue Mountain's ICSP
- A shared understanding of roles and responsibilities among various stakeholders
- An opportunity to establish various theme areas and working groups.

2 Workshop Format

The workshops followed a standard format developed by The Natural Step. Workshop contents were the same in both sessions; and it was offered twice, to ensure that as many participants as possible have an opportunity to attend. Participants included stakeholders from all walks of life present in town (businesses, schools, associations, interest groups) as well as town staff and elected representatives.

Workshop sessions were held at the Blue Mountain Inn in the town of The Blue Mountains. Participants were invited individually and were asked to register ahead of time with staff from Engineering & Public Works and Solid Waste & Environmental Initiatives. Each participant was given a workshop package at the time of registration, which included:
- A workshop Agenda
- A workbook on sustainability prepared by The Natural Step

Workshop 1:

Workshop 1 was held on April 8 2009 (9 am to 1pm) in the Ravenna room. A total of 42 participants attended the workshop. The room was set up with eight roundtables seating 5-6 participants at each table.

Workshop 2:

Workshop 2 was held on April 15 (1 pm to 5 pm) in the Inn Café. A total of 60 participants attended the workshop. The room was set up with ten roundtables seating about 6 participants at each table.

3   Workshop Contents

Welcome and Introductions

Jeffery Fletcher, Manager of Solid Waste and Environmental Initiatives welcomed the participants and invited them to actively engage in the workshop discussions and freely share ideas. Jeffery gave brief opening remarks and introduced himself; Adam McMullin, from Engineering and Public Works; Mike Purcell from The Natural Step; and Sally Leppard and Olav Sibille from Lura Consulting.

Jeffery mentioned that participants were asked one-on-one to be present in the workshop as the Town understands that the development of an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan is important and complex work. It is anticipated that a multi-disciplinary approach will be required to actualize the community's vision and plans – which is why we've invited a broad representation of our community, Jeffery added.

Jeffery explained that a sustainable path will include action plans that will be ambitious, complex and include a comprehensive partnership within the community.   He also mentioned that as a result of this process, The Blue Mountains would like to create unique, strong local partnerships that will continue to strengthen the social, cultural, economic and environmental status of the entire community well after the plan is developed. He concluded his presentation by providing a couple of inspirational thoughts on sustainability.

Task 1: Overview of Integrated Community Sustainability Plan process

Sally Leppard, from Lura Consulting, then briefly introduced the 6 steps of the Sustainability Process namely; Process Framework; Vision, Goals and Objectives; Current State, Gap Analysis; Strategic Directions; Actions, and Implementing and Monitoring.

Task 2: Warm-Up – Our community

Mike Purcell, from The Natural Step, started the workshop discussion indicating that an ICSP is not the same kind of plan that we are used to. For it to be really successful, we need to work together, collaboratively, towards our desired future, Mike added.

Mike then asked participants to identify, in groups of 3, something about their community that _they feel proud of_. Answers received in both workshop sessions included mentions to:

- *Community sports* – such as the soccer program at the Beaver Valley Athletic Association that engage hundreds of kids and volunteers, as well as coaches, managers and trainers. Easy access to outdoor activities
- *Diversity of the community* – referring to people, activities and the landscape
- *Local identity* – maintaining a small town beauty and charm in spite of its proximity to Toronto
- *Optimistic community* – residents have great attitude. The Blue Mountains is a very positive and progressive municipality; openness and giving spirit of the community
- *Physical attributes* – beautiful natural and built environment and landscape in the Town and also in the Region e.g.; Collingwood, Owen sound, Georgian trail, Niagara escarpment and the Bay
- *Volunteering* – community is very supportive and enjoys active volunteering e.g. community clean up, Beaver Valley Outreach, Beaver Valley Public School
- *Well-knitted community* – The Blue Mountains is a safe and welcoming community to its new residents. It is friendly, accepting and safe
- *Environment* – Its natural forests, trails, and fresh water.
- **Youth engagement** - municipalities have taken actions to integrate youth, youth advisory committee, Mayor has been active on it.
- **Environmentally sensitivity** - Growing environmental interest and involvement e.g. Solar panels on the Thornbury entrance signs. Also, Grey Bruce Community Foundation held a conference – Go Green at Blue - and they were very pleased at how the community received it
- **Commitment to accessibility** - municipality is taking steps to becoming more accessible
- **Collingwood's heritage district** – federally and provincially designated and actively supported by all levels of government
- **Plethora of youthful and interesting things to do** –many interesting people and groups live in the area, lots of interesting things to do
- **Arts and culture –** very active
- **Access to great health care**

Task 3: Visioning

Using a World Café format the visioning exercise required participants to imagine that they were 30 years from now, and that they would have to explain to their grandchildren why it would be a good idea for them to move back to The Blue Mountains. Emphasis was on identifying what are the desirable *characteristics* of The Blue Mountains in the future exactly as they would like to see it.

Enthusiastic and productive discussion ensued in each of the tables. Highlights of the *characteristics* identified by the participants included a vision of The Blue Mountains as being a community with:

-   A nationally recognized "**Complete Community**" that provides opportunities to everyone to live, work and play locally, regardless of their level of income; with affordable housing options and diverse employment and shopping opportunities.

-   A **cohesive community** that offers everyone a sense of place and with respect between long-term residents, and those who have come here by choice

-   A leading-edge and sustainable and **diversified economy;** with diversified employment that creates value added, adequate facilities and spearheading sophisticated world class activities and industries such as medical research/services (in spite of its small size).

-   A community with breathtaking **natural beauty;** with abundance of green space, fresh air, trails, trees, forests, and clean water.
-   A community with expanded **educational opportunities**, low unemployment and good income levels that is able to retain its youth and talents; attract outside talent and provide life-long learning opportunities.

- A community with **environmentally friendly light industries**, that are cradle-to-cradle; and related theme industries. A good local example is Apple Orchards is a successful local industry and one of the largest industries in the area and has made possible that other apple related industries prosper in town keeping employment.

- A community that is **efficiently connected** through a well maintained – minimal- road structure throughout all seasons, and has a variety of active transportation choices that are 'fast and easy' like mass transit, pedestrian's paths and cycling routes.

- A community with **great -and affordable- lifestyle and recreational options** for locals and visitors.

- An **integrated community** with outstanding volunteerism, cultural diversity and accessible for people with disabilities; with successful mentorship with our retirees volunteering skills to help young adults

- A community that **grows in a smart way**, keeping and respecting its natural features and allowing growth and land uses that are feasible, compatible and sustainable.

- A community that is **well integrated in the region** within a network of towns that cooperate with each other.


- A community that is a **green energy leader, and** self-sustaining in energy – wind, solar, hydro-electric resources and with plenty of electric vehicles

- A community where residents enjoy efficient access to **health care services** and resources.

- A community that has a vibrant **arts and culture** scene with active night life and cultural entertainment options including theatres and libraries.

- A young community with **average age in the 30s,** not in 50s

- A community where it **is impossible to be bored**

- A community with **affordable activities and services** that is a great place even to be poor! One can go fishing, walking, enjoy pristine river corridors for canoeing, wildlife, water quality environmental stewardship.

- A community that is a **centre for innovation** – in terms of technology – health care, communications, education and development that attract clean businesses and supporting infrastructure.
- A community that has an **outstanding local government** that works effectively with other layers of governments (probably with one less layer of government - regional), with policies that support complete communities and small business opportunities.

- A community that enjoys a **creative tension** between those we elect to govern for us, and information coming *from the citizens themselves.*

- A community where **children grow roots,** are proud of being part of it and don't want to leave
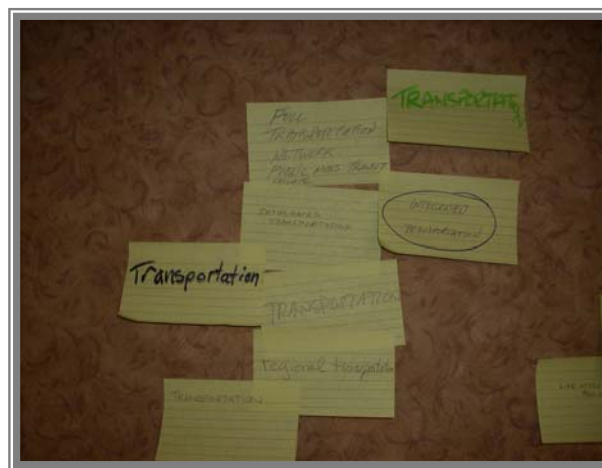
Task 4: Common Themes

For this task, Mike asked each group to identify five to ten top themes, to write them down on post-its and then to paste them on the wall. The original comments, organized by *emerging themes* were the following (Number of post-its from both sessions is shown in brackets):

- **SENSE OF COMMUNITY** (20): 'Complete' community, 'Blender' community, strong political system, engage participation ("buy-in"), self-sufficiency for all, social connectiveness, social services, inclusiveness, safe communities, accessible communities, caring and compassionate community, diverse community (culture, age and races), age supportive lifestyle for all, multigenerational integration, preserve character, preserve heritage (roots)

- **ECONOMICS** (19): economic diversity, economic development, employment, self-sustaining jobs, industries, incentives, keeping our agriculture, entrepreneurial, well paid, local, appropriate for technological advances, tourism, diverse opportunities (not only relying on tourism), jobs for all ages, careers, barter system, innovation, centre for innovative industries

- **ENVIRONMENT** (16): Natural environment, natural heritage, environmental awareness, protection of green space, preservation, respect and stewardship of green spaces (water, nature) and sustainable environment, forest cover, waterways accessible, waste control, green living that reduces carbon footprint, promotion of biodiversity, water

- **HOUSING** (15): Housing mix, affordable housing stock (in particular to seniors), integrated housing

- **TRANSPORTATION** (15): full transportation network, public mass transit, integrated transportation (light rail, mono rail, taxis), alternative, active, linked, accessible and affordable

- **HEALTH CARE** (13): promotion, prevention, treatment; proactive, long-term and acute care; healthy and active living, accessible care for all ages, mobile services, integration medical & social services

- **ARTS AND CULTURE** (10): cultural diversity, rural culture and lifestyle, cultural centre/school, cultural heritage, embracing diversity, maintaining historical rural routes

- **AGRICULTURE** (9): Agriculture and sustainable food, protection of agricultural land use, food security, local/organic, agriculture protection and promotion

- **EDUCATION** (8): Leading edge education, post-secondary educational opportunities, mentorship, opportunities for all, life-long learning, education for innovation

- **REGIONAL APPROACH** (8): Regional connectivity, manage growth, government and policy, local government supportive, sustainable town business plan, effective government

- **RECREATION** (7): Lifestyle and recreation, international sports destination, social and physical

- **ENERGY** (6): distribution and generation, green energy leader, energy wise, sustainable

- **INFRASTRUCTURE** (6): Public infrastructure, Road infrastructure and maintenance that support four season activities and supports change, transit, community network (shared infrastructure)

- **YOUTH** (6): Youth services, schools, alternative education, 'hang outs', activities, jobs for youth, children programs, daycare

Task 5: Sustainability Risks and Opportunities and The Natural Step Framework

Mike asked participants to read the text on The Funnel (page 5 of the workbook) which is an analogy that The Natural Step uses to explain sustainability concepts. Once participants had finished their reading, they were asked to discuss in their tables some examples of trends that illustrate the metaphor and how they thought it related to The Blue Mountains. Mike reminded participants that here was a need to take a step back on the business as usual approach and think more in terms of systems thinking.

Participants identified the following _challenges_ that The Blue Mountains face:

-   **Source water/ground water** – it is foreseen that there will be a crisis down the road. People wonder whether there will be enough water in the ground to sustain future water needs in the community.
-   **Energy** – seen under both, a positive lens as a resource or under a negative lens as a threat. Current push towards significant investment in renewable energy could be a blessing or a threat to local environment. Renewable energy wind farms are a real possibility for the community given its wind energy potential.
-   **Competition for land** – potential land use conflicts e.g.; farming, tourism, residential – there is a limited land base and development is expanding.
-   **Limited local employment opportunities** – Fundamental questions to answer include; what will people do for employment? Where will they go? How will we train them? What will we train them in to sustain our communities?
-   **Implement positive change towards sustainability –** Participants felt that there is not enough time to educate people and get them to fully understand what sustainability entails, so they question themselves; How to communicate the urgency of needed action, How are we going to get this kind of knowledge out to everybody? How do we do that effectively and quickly?

- **Sustainability is beyond environmental** – it is all encompassing, and that complexity is a challenge that will require well thought strategies.
- **Climate Change** – The economy of the community depends a lot on weather fluctuation; if weather gets consistently warmer, it could become too expensive for ski areas to operate by having to make artificial snow.
- **Managing Growth**- Greater Toronto Area wanting to move up here, and how do we manage that? How to keep agriculture, green space and still have areas for development? How to deal with intensification? We know that density has to increase, but what about potential opposition? Municipalities need to develop clear and strong policies that will require political will and deal with political pressure
- **Reduce consumption and waste** – As a participant summarized it"eat it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without."

Reflecting on the contents of the text "Opportunity Knocks" (page 6 of the workbook); Mike mentioned that we will have the same needs in the future as we have today. A participant was rather of the opinion that our needs might change and in fact we need to change our needs. Mike explained that needs do not actually change, what changes is how we satisfy our needs.

Task 6: Value of a Shared Language and the 4 Sustainability Principles

A drawing exercise was conducted in the second session. Based on the exercise, Mike explained that we have a better chance to achieve things that we could 'visualize' (we know how they look like); as opposed to things that are not clearly defined or are difficult to verbalize. Thus common understanding can be used for working together and for consensus building.

Mike then introduced the Four Principles of Success for a Sustainable Society. He mentioned that in a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing:
- Concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust;
- Concentrations of substances produced by society
- Degradation by physical means.
And, in that society,
- People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.

Mike also explained that at some point our demands overwhelm the Earth's capacity to furnish and replenish the natural resources and processes that support us, or to absorb and recycle the wastes we produce. Society

has needs such as subsistence (the most important), protection, participation, idleness, affection, understanding, creativity, identity and freedom; the key question is _how_ to satisfy those needs while making society sustainable. _Biomimicry_, a new science that identifies green substances that can replace chemicals, was mentioned as an effort to contribute to sustainability.

To provide an idea of the discussion that ensued; the following summarizes the exchange of questions and answers between the participants and Mike (sample from the second session).

Comment: What do you say to the inevitable cynic, who asks whether the scientific community would think that we should ever be in a position to get 100% towards sustainability? If we hypothesize that every 10 years we increase sustainability by a fraction, do we ever get to the end?
Answer: There will never be an end, because there will always be new problems to face. This process changes the way that we think about decisions, and gets a community pushing in a similar direction. We'd all be naïve to think there is a finite position. This process helps to make us aware so that we consume less.

Comment: A challenges that our community has, is that we're sitting here thinking it's great, but we have to take it to the next level, take it to our next level, how do we get everyone on board, to make sure it is a whole community initiative, and not some key people pushing things along.
Answer: Behaviour change strategies will be included in the work ahead to encourage participation, although not everyone will get on board, and that is fine.

Comment: Assuming that Blue Mountain, Georgian Triangle, Ontario, Canada, get on board 100%, it may be that while we're doing all of that, the opposite is happening the other way from China and India, it's like a losing battle unless everyone gets into it.
Answer: Start with the shared belief that this is a beautiful place to be, and figure out how to keep it that way (focus on the local effects).

Comment: There are tremendous opportunities here, but if you try to grab on to too many, too quickly, you spread yourself too thin, try to get a list of priorities, see 5 or 6 that are the top of the list and start there, concentrate on those, if you have success, then pick up another few.

Comment: Timing is important. This Town has gone through a lot of growth and it's not in crisis. People are quite open to discussing change/future, unlike some other communities. Don't sense there's a shot gun approach.

Comment: Communication is a key foundation, stop the silo, more heads are better than one.

Mayor Anderson's Comment: "I'm really excited, I'm an optimist, not a skeptic". Mayor Anderson said that we need to keep an open mind, and that there is already a heightened awareness among key staff. There is municipal support throughout the entire region for this initiative.

Comment: As we achieve things, we need to celebrate successes.

Task 7: The ABCD's of Strategic Sustainability Planning

Mike introduced The ABCD's of Strategic Sustainability Planning: (A)wareness, (B)aseline Sustainability Assessment, (C)ompelling Vision and Creative Solutions, and (D)own to Actions. Participants were invited to reflect on their strategies and actions by asking themselves:
- Does that action move us in the <u>right direction</u> with respect to all four sustainability principles?
- Does it serve as a <u>flexible platform</u>?
- Does it give us a good <u>return on our investment</u>?

Task 8: ICSP Case Study

Mike summarized the case study for Whistler pointing out its achievements in various strategy areas as a result of the whole community working together towards common goals. Then Mike asked participants to imagine how an ICSP would work for The Blue Mountains. Other questions included; what does our transportation system look like today? How can we use the four sustainability principles? What would a sustainable future transportation system for The Blue Mountains look like?

A new approach to sustainability gives also many opportunities. For illustration purposes, Mike mentioned that if the community were to use a horse and buggy transportation system; the horse manure could be used to compost it, and energy could be generated by harvesting methane from it. The main idea is that whatever system the community chooses to use, it has to fit within the four sustainability rules.

A discussion ensued on initiatives that could be undertaken locally. The guiding question for the discussion was; where is the balance between good and bad? For example, arguments could be made in favour and against solar panels and wind turbines as means of generating renewable energy, so; how to determine the benefits of meeting one rule, for another? Mike explained that it boils down to community _values._

It is important for The Blue Mountains to set out goals, and to implement a monitoring process, typically through indicators, that would allow for adjustments and continuous improvements.

A participant asked how Whistler was integrating population explosion and what were they doing to accommodate technology change. Mike explained that they are constantly searching for best practices on how to integrate growth and also looking into leading edge technology that could be brought locally if it does make sense, in general and economic sense in particular.

Mike asked participants; what does today discussion mean for The Blue Mountains? How might an ICSP process be valuable to the community? And, what are the challenges and risks that participants could think of.

Mike wrapped-up this section by explaining that sustainability means different things to different people. The Working Groups to be formed ahead will be tasked with getting into the specific of the identified Sustainability Themes. For example in the case the Working Groups will need to answer to questions such as: "What is the desirable health care system for the blue mountains? What is a desirable transportation system that is sustainable? This exercise will help identify specific characteristics which contributes in the developing of a vision for the future of The Blue Mountains, and as importantly; the actions that will need to be implemented to move into the direction of sustainability.

Task 9: Review and Summary of Highlights

At the end of the first workshop, Jeffery presented a brief summary of what was achieved during the session, recognizing everyone's participation, their valuable insight on the characteristics of a desirable future and the identification of top themes of interest. Jeffery also mentioned that the next group could have new themes, and that the results of both workshops will be integrated to identify consensual theme areas that are considered as priorities.

Task 10: Next Steps

Adam McMullin informed the participants that the next steps in the process were:
- the preparation of a vision that will be presented on May 27
- Creation of working groups – a mandate and work structure for each of those working groups will be prepared.

Adam thanked everyone for their participation in the workshop sessions.

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Note: While every effort has been made to reflect actual comments, they should not be considered as verbatim records. Should you find that a comment doesn't reflect the original intended idea, please notify immediately:

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Thank you!

APPENDICES:

E. Workshop Agenda
F. PowerPoint Presentation
G. Workbook
H. List of Participants