

MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN



Alberta Urban Municipalities Association



FAST-TRACK Guide

JUNE 2006

A fast-track guide to sustainable planning for all Alberta communities



Municipal Sustainability Planning is an opportunity for municipalities to look long-term at the communities they want and take proactive steps to move there.

It is an opportunity to engage citizens in a dialogue about what they value about their communities and what they want them to look like in the future.

It is an opportunity to provide an outlet for the wisdom and expertise of community members to discover innovative solutions that address social, cultural, economic, environmental, and governance challenges today while leaving a positive legacy for future generations.

Sustainability ... living in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Brundtland Commission, 1987



C O N T E N T S

A. Introduction

B. 5 Steps to a Municipal Sustainability Plan

C. How It All 'Fits' Together

D. Collaborative, Inclusive, Transparent Community Building

A. Introduction

Communities across Canada are facing increasing challenges in managing growth and development. Current challenges common to communities across Alberta include:

- Inadequate funding to provide and maintain essential services and infrastructure
- Need for greater economic diversity
- Aging population
- Developing opportunities for young people
- Air quality
- Provision of a reliable and clean water supply
- Need to sustain long-term community development and capacity building

These are just a few of the challenges facing Alberta communities. Such challenges point to the need to plan for future growth and development in way that is based on sound governance and is socially, culturally, economically and environmentally responsible.

This **Fast-Track Guidebook** Guide has been developed by the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) to assist communities as they start to develop their Municipal Sustainability Plans. This Fast-Track Guide provides a basic framework for developing a Municipal Sustainability Plan specifically tailored for communities in Alberta. This framework provides an overview of the complete process for developing a Municipal Sustainability Plan, and can be adapted to any community, regardless of size. For more in-depth information on the process, along with additional tools and resources for undertaking the development of a Municipal Sustainability Plan, AUMA has also developed a comprehensive **MSP Guide** for communities.

Municipal Sustainability Planning is not intended to 're-invent the wheel' and is not necessarily an onerous or time-consuming process. Many communities are already doing sustainability planning (or elements of sustainability planning) in one form or another. The Municipal Sustainability Plan process helps pull all the existing work together in one place. It also provides a clear focus for planning future growth and development based on good governance and social, cultural, economic and environmental responsibility.

2. 5 Steps to a Municipal Sustainability Plan



5 steps to a MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Communities across Canada are facing increasing challenges in managing growth and development. Some of the common challenges for communities in Alberta include:

- Inadequate funding to provide and maintain essential services and infrastructure
- Need for greater economic diversity
- Aging population
- Developing opportunities for young people
- Air quality
- Provision of a reliable and clean water supply
- Need to sustain long-term community development and capacity building

Proper sustainability planning also requires approaches to governance that are responsive to community needs and to grass-roots initiatives that promote sustainability. This QuikView brochure has been developed by the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) to assist communities as they begin to develop their sustainability plans.

Municipal Sustainability Planning is not intended to "re-invent the wheel" and is not necessarily an onerous or time-consuming process. Many communities are already doing sustainability planning. The Municipal Sustainability Plan process helps pull all the community's existing work together in one place. It also provides a clear focus for planning future growth and development based on responsive governance and social, cultural, economic and environmental responsibility.

These are just a few of the challenges facing both rural and urban communities. Such challenges point to the need to plan for future growth and development in way that is socially, culturally, economically and environmentally responsible.

step 1 vision

What do you want your community to look like 10, 20 or 30 years in the future? What's important to your community?



partnerships AFFORDABLE RESPECT
safe DYNAMIC better quality of life
strong, diverse economy Vibrant
PROTECTED NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OPEN SPACE
strong social support systems
cultural opportunities BALANCED caring
interconnected pathways

1

step 2 success

Now, take that vision further...
What do you really like your community to look like in 10, 20 or 30 years in terms of:

- economy and governance
- natural and built environment
- social and cultural systems

STRONG ECONOMY & GOVERNANCE
+
HEALTHY NATURAL & BUILT ENVIRONMENT
+
STRONG SOCIAL & CULTURAL SYSTEMS

≈ vision 2

step 3 current reality

Now that you know where you want to go, identify where you are.
What's the current reality in your community in terms of:

- economy and governance
- natural and built environment
- social and cultural systems

3

step 4 action plan

Now that you know where you want to go (your vision from step 1 and step 2), and you know where you are today (from step 3), develop a list of actions that will help move your community forward towards its vision.

Don't panic! You won't be able to achieve your vision overnight. By taking it step-by-step and implementing one positive action after another, you will build a sustainable community.



4

step 5 implement/monitor

As your community starts to implement actions, continually monitor your progress by developing and using indicators. Monitoring and implementation will help you determine if you're going in the right direction and how fast you're moving toward your vision.

Don't leave it on the shelf! A Municipal Sustainability Plan needs to be dusted off every now and then so you can determine where you are in achieving your vision, and what your next steps should be.

Congratulations! You are well on your way to a more balanced, healthier community, a better quality of life, and a positive contribution to a healthier planet.



5

Step 1 | VISION

Imagine your future.

Visioning is a way of defining and achieving a desirable future – we are more likely to reach an objective if we can see it, and can imagine the steps to reach it. Citizens can use visioning to create images that help guide change in their community.

Imagine you are living in your community as it should be 20, 30, or 50 years into the future. In that desired future, what are the defining features of your community? What is your community known for in the region? What are the top three values of your community?

Developing a vision statement is a way of bringing together the various ideas of success in a community, into one clear, concise and readily understandable statement. The ability for everyone in a community to quickly grasp the ideas in the vision statement, and to see their own personal vision for their community reflected in this statement, is critical to achieving the vision.

A visioning process should clarify the values of the community and its defining characteristics in the future – simply answer the question – what kind of community do I want to live in 20, 30, or 50 years in the future? A successful community vision should be “felt in the heart and understood in the mind”.

A vision statement is a very broad, all encompassing statement of what the community is all about. It should be inspiring and challenging and seen as worthwhile. It should be clearly articulated in as few words as possible. The vision should be sufficiently tangible and quantifiable. Many communities have already developed a vision. That’s great. You can either use the one you have, or do a temperature check. Invite community members to a short visioning workshop and let them tell you what they want their community to look like in 20, 30, or 50 years. What features of the community are important to them? What values are important to them? What kind of community do they want for their children and grandchildren? Let everyone have their say, and then let them vote on their favorite.

Many communities have already developed a vision. That’s great. You can either use the one you have, or do a temperature check. Invite community members to a short visioning workshop and let them tell you what they want their community to look like in 20, 30, or 50 years. What features of the community are important to them? What values are important to them? What kind of community do they want for their children and grandchildren? Let everyone have their say, and then let them vote on their favorite. For a sampling of visions in other communities, go to [Sample Vision Statements](#).

For more detail, go to the comprehensive [MSP Guide Phase 2](#).

Step 2 | SUCCESS

Now that you've imagined your community in the future, let's imagine the steps to reach it.

Being strategic requires having a clear understanding of success, of where one wants to be. Brainstorm your future community. Imagine you are walking through your community as it should be 20, 30, or 50 years into the future. What do you see? What do the buildings look like? Where

Dimensions of a Sustainable Community	Theme Area	Description of Success ¹
Economy	Economy	Business and employment opportunities in the industrial, retail, office, service, and agricultural sectors, result in a diversified local economy and improvements in our community.
	Governance	<p>Leadership The Municipal Government provides effective and inclusive leadership, representation and participation in developing sustainable communities where people can live, work and play</p> <p>Growth Management A long-term strategic plan that provides for the orderly and efficient development of land for housing, business, jobs and community amenities and facilities.</p>
Environment	Housing and Neighborhoods	Land is designated for a variety of housing types to provide residents with a choice in housing form, location and price.
	Environment and Parks	Our parks and environmentally valuable areas are protected and provide adequate park space in the community
	Design	Development has a pleasing appearance with a coordinated design theme which results in appealing streetscapes in our residential neighbourhoods and commercial areas.
	Utilities and Services Transportation	There is efficient provision of water, stormwater, liquid and solid waste and other utility services throughout the community. The road network is safe and efficient and can accommodate different modes of mobility such as cars, trucks, public transit, bicycles, and pedestrians.
Social	Community	Arts and culture, recreation, library, fire, police, education, social programs and health services are provided to meet the present and future needs of residents.
Culture	Diversity	The community exhibits tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures

¹ The Description of Success comes from a variety of sources, including the City of Port Coquitlam POCOPlan Workbook, October 2003, the Egan Review, Skills for Sustainable Communities, etc.

do people gather? How do they make decisions? What are they eating? Where are they working? How do they learn? How are they travelling? What is happening on the street? Where is the centre of the community? How do green space and water fit into the picture? What do you see when you walk around after dark?

Now that you've brainstormed the various aspects of your community in the future, let's organize that information into theme areas, with a clear vision of success for each theme area. Here are some sample theme areas and descriptions of success to get you started:

Use the Sustainability Dimensions and Descriptions of Success and adapt them to your own community, or develop your own – whatever works best for your community.

It should be noted that the Descriptions of Success often touch on all 5 Dimensions of Sustainability. For example, decisions about transportation have impacts on the economy and on the social or cultural dimensions of a community. Try to recognize opportunities for integration in your sustainability planning.

For more detail, go to the comprehensive **MSP Guide Phase 3.**

Step 3 | CURRENT REALITY

Where are you now?

Now that you know where you want to go, figure out where you are. You've created a vision, and have broken that vision down into theme areas with success clearly identified - take that one step further and identify where your community is now in each theme area.

For more detail, go to the comprehensive [MSP Guide Phase 3](#).

Dimensions of a Sustainable Community	Theme Area	Description of Success ¹	Current Reality ²
Economy	Economy	Business and employment opportunities in the industrial, retail, office, service, and agricultural sectors, result in a diversified local economy and improvements in our community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown core declining • High percentage of seasonal employment • Large number of entry level jobs that pay lower incomes • Can't attract/develop enough skilled labor
	Governance	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Municipal Government provides effective and inclusive leadership, representation and participation in developing sustainable communities where people can live, work and play • Community residents are uninformed of future plans for growth within the community • There are limited opportunities for community involvement in planning
		Growth Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A long-term strategic plan that provides for the orderly and efficient development of land for housing, business, jobs and community amenities and facilities. • Lack of a strategic plan for the community that clearly identifies the long-term vision for the community and a operational plan to achieve the vision
Environment	Housing and Neighborhoods	Land is designated for a variety of housing types to provide residents with a choice in housing form, location and price.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of affordable housing • Lack of diversity in housing - elderly and youth can't find a place to live • High demand for housing from outside the community driving up prices • Land development is non-contiguous and inefficient
	Environment and Parks	Our parks and environmentally valuable areas are protected and provide adequate park space in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough park space • Park space is not interconnected and insufficient • Natural areas not protected – experiencing increasing use and degradation • Development encroaching on natural areas
	Design	Development has a pleasing appearance with a coordinated design theme which results in appealing streetscapes in our residential neighbourhoods and commercial areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Houses all look the same • Lack of good quality public open space/meeting space • Use of cheap materials results in maintenance problems within a few years
	Utilities and Services	There is efficient provision of water, stormwater, liquid and solid waste and other utility services throughout the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens have a false sense of abundance of water • Lack of money to upgrade systems • Wastewater exceeds permit levels of nutrients and chemical compounds at times • Boil water advisories • Energy, sewer, water infrastructure is reaching capacity
	Transportation	The road network is safe and efficient and can accommodate different modes of mobility such as cars, trucks, public transit, bicycles, and pedestrians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation infrastructure is aging – lack of funding for maintenance and upgrades
Social	Community	Arts and culture, recreation, library, fire, police, education, social programs and health services are provided to meet the present and future needs of residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of social programs to deal with violence and drug abuse • Lack of accessible health services • Lack of arts and recreation programs – particularly for youth
Culture	Diversity	The community exhibits tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited cultural awareness/engagement opportunities

¹ The Description of Success comes from a variety of sources, including the City of Port Coquitlam POCOPlan Workbook, October 2003, the Egan Review, Skills for Sustainable Communities, etc.

² The Current Reality comes from a variety of sources including the AUMA MSP Guide, Appendix 5, May 2006

Step 4 | ACTION PLAN

Take action to achieve your future.

Dimensions of a Sustainable Community	Theme Area	Description of Success ¹	Current Reality ²	Actions ³
Economy	Economy	Business and employment opportunities in the industrial, retail, office, service, and agricultural sectors, result in a diversified local economy and improvements in our community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downtown core declining High percentage of seasonal employment Large number of entry level jobs that pay lower incomes Can't attract/develop enough skilled labor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce the Downtown as the primary centre of the community Support local start-up businesses and enterprises Permit a wider range of Home Based Businesses Contain future commercial development to existing commercial areas and promote their distinct identities Consider permitting site-specific neighbourhood commercial uses
	Leadership	The Municipal Government provides effective and inclusive leadership, representation and participation in developing sustainable communities where people can live, work and play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community residents are uninformed of future plans for growth within the community There are limited opportunities for community involvement in planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish ongoing, consistent channels of communication with community members to provide up-to-date information on the growth and development of the community Provide ongoing opportunities for community involvement in planning i.e. open houses, round-tables, surveys/questionnaires, etc.
Governance	Growth Management	A long-term strategic plan that provides for the orderly and efficient development of land for housing, business, jobs and community amenities and facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of a strategic plan for the community that clearly identifies the long-term vision for the community and a operational plan to achieve the vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a long-term strategic plan based on social, economic and environmental responsibility Retain the existing industrial and/or commercial land designations
	Housing and Neighborhoods	Land is designated for a variety of housing types to provide residents with a choice in housing form, location and price.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of affordable housing Lack of diversity in housing - elderly and youth can't find a place to live High demand for housing from outside the community driving up prices Land development is non-contiguous and inefficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider small, infill development such as duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, granny flats, and freehold row housing, which could be integrated throughout the community Continue to permit secondary suites in single-family houses and review the existing secondary suite regulations to determine whether they are effective
Environment	Environment and Parks	Our parks and environmentally valuable areas are protected and provide adequate park space in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not enough park space Park space is not interconnected and insufficient Natural areas not protected – experiencing increasing use and degradation Development encroaching on natural areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect our environmentally sensitive areas by securing them in public ownership Provide park space, greenways, trails, and pedestrian and cyclist corridors throughout the community Make development and streetscapes more environmentally friendly by establishing low impact, alternative development standards Encourage community initiatives for the environment, particularly streamkeeper, trailkeeper, and parkkeeper group activities

Now that you know where you want to go (vision and description of success) and where you are (current reality), develop a list of actions that will help move your community towards its vision.

This is a creative, fun exercise to generate as many innovative initiatives as possible, both large and small. Allow for ideas that may seem impractical today (e.g. solar energy or hydrogen fuel cells). After all, no one knows for sure what will happen in the future, and current challenges could easily become future opportunities.

For a sampling of innovative actions that other communities have undertaken go to **Sources for Innovative Actions.**

	Design	Development has a pleasing appearance with a coordinated design theme which results in appealing streetscapes in our residential neighbourhoods and commercial areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Houses all look the same • Lack of good quality public open space/ meeting space • Use of cheap materials results in maintenance problems within a few years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure high quality design and improved streetscapes in new development • Create distinct identifies for our residential and commercial areas by encouraging coordinated design themes appropriate to the area
	Utilities and Services	There is efficient provision of water, stormwater, liquid and solid waste and other utility services throughout the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens have a false sense of abundance of water • Lack of money to upgrade systems • Wastewater exceeds permit levels of nutrients and chemical compounds at times • Boil water advisories • Energy, sewer, water infrastructure is reaching capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobby provincial and federal governments for funding to upgrade/ maintain existing infrastructure • Explore partnerships with the private sector for funding infrastructure • Encourage conservation efforts for reducing water use, solid waste and energy use
	Transportation	The road network is safe and efficient and can accommodate different modes of mobility such as cars, trucks, public transit, bicycles, and pedestrians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation infrastructure is aging – lack of funding for maintenance and upgrades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore all funding opportunities including public/private partnerships for transportation projects • Promote alternatives to the single occupant automobile such as carpooling, transit, cycling and walking
Social	Community	Arts and culture, recreation, library, fire, police, education, social programs and health services are provided to meet the present and future needs of residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of social programs to deal with violence and drug abuse • Lack of accessible health services • Lack of arts and recreation programs – particularly for youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to provide and fund parks, recreation and community services at the municipal levels • Explore possibilities for the delivery of parks and recreation services by the private sector or through private/ public partnerships • Explore other avenues to provide community and support services
Culture	Diversity	The community exhibits tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited cultural awareness/engagement opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and deliver programs to create connections between the generations in the community • Improve communication of existing arts, culture and heritage events/ programs

¹ The Description of Success comes from a variety of sources, including the City of Port Coquitlam POCOPlan Workbook, October 2003, the Egan Review, Skills for Sustainable Communities, etc.

² The Current Reality comes from a variety of sources including the AUMA MSP Guide, Appendix S, May 2006

³ The Actions comes from a variety of sources including the City of Port Coquitlam POCOPlan Workbook, the AUMA MSP Guide, and Whistler 2020 Moving Towards a Sustainable Future

You can have as many actions as you need to achieve success. Some of your actions will be short-term (i.e. achievable within a year), while others may take longer (i.e. 5 years, 10 years or 20 years).

While brainstorming the various theme areas, you may come up with quite a few actions. Here's a simple way to rank your actions. Use the following 4 questions to help you sort out the relative value of each action:

1. Will this action move us towards our community's definition of success?
2. Will this action move us towards the Sustainability Principles?
3. Will this action provide flexibility for future community leaders to take action?
4. Will this action generate sufficient economic and political return to seed future investments?

There is no pass/fail when asking these questions about a specific action. Rather, the questions will help you rank an action relative to all the other actions that were identified. The actions that 'rise to the top' for each theme area will comprise the Capital Plan. This is the list of capital infrastructure projects that will be built in the future, subject to municipal financing.

In addition to capital infrastructure, municipalities also provide community services that nurture more sustainable communities. Such services can be just as important as or even more important than capital infrastructure. Together with capital investments, these community services will help you achieve your vision, provide good governance, and take actions that are socially, culturally, economically and environmentally responsible.

For more detail, go to the comprehensive [MSP Guide Phase 4](#).

Step 5 | IMPLEMENT/MONITOR

Just do it!

The Municipal Development Plan, the Land Use Bylaw and the Capital Plan, as well as other policies, business plans, and budgets are the main implementation tools that municipalities use to determine what gets built on the ground. The vision and actions developed in the Municipal Sustainability Plan need to be carried through and reflected in these documents to manage change and achieve success. The actions identified in the Municipal Sustainability Plan need to be carried forward and referenced in the Multi-Year Capital Infrastructure Plan and/or in Community Plans so they actually happen! (see “How It All ‘Fits’ Together” on the next page for more information).

The other critical piece for implementation and the ultimate success of the Municipal Sustainability Plan is community buy-in and responsibility. Council can't do it alone. This has to be a partnership of all members of a community working towards a common goal. Community members and business leaders bring the innovative ideas, the creativity, and the power to stimulate change at the grass roots. Local government can't implement change unless the community is receptive to it, and is willing to undertake responsibility for carrying out some of the actions identified in the Municipal Sustainability Plan.

Measure success!

As actions are being implemented, use **sustainability indicators** that help you determine if you're moving from current reality towards your description of success. Examples of indicators already developed by other communities can be found in **Resources for Indicators**. Don't leave it on the shelf! Ongoing or periodic monitoring and evaluation will help your community understand how close it is to achieving its vision. Timely evaluation helps to identify problems and develop solutions that can save time, money and effort. As well, your community may want to publish a sustainability report periodically that not only provides an update on progress towards success, but also serves to maintain awareness and interest for the project in the community.

Regular sustainability reporting adds value to ongoing implementation and monitoring, without 're-inventing the wheel'. Many communities incorporate sustainability reporting into their day-to-day planning reports and budgeting processes.

For more detail, go to the comprehensive **MSP Guide Phase 5**.

C. How It All 'Fits' Together

The Municipal Sustainability Plan is the glue that will hold your community together – it will move your community into the future in a socially, culturally, economically and environmentally responsible manner. It will also help to foster leadership in the community and assist you in providing good governance. Most importantly, it will help you achieve your vision. In achieving your vision, the 'how' is relatively straightforward – develop a Municipal Sustainability Plan, and then update your Municipal Development Plan (and any other policy documents), Land Use Bylaw, and Capital Plan (which will direct your multi-year budgeting, capital investment, and service provision). Examples of how to update your current documents can be found in the MSP Guide under **Integrating Existing Planning Processes**. The actual 'doing' of this is tough but creative work – it means having the courage to make a change – to do things differently – that's the exciting part!



D. Collaborative, Inclusive, Transparent Community Building

The support and leadership of Council is critical for developing and implementing a Municipal Sustainability Plan. Depending on the community, Council may decide to take on the bulk of the work themselves and provide feedback opportunities with citizens at various stages in the process, or may choose to involve citizens at a greater level throughout the process. The amount and type of community involvement will be different for every municipality and will depend on the community, the Council, the level of previous public involvement in planning activities, etc. There is no right or wrong. However, keep in mind that the more people than can be involved in the process, the more buy-in to the Plan, and therefore the higher chance of success.

A common engagement process for communities currently involved in developing Municipal Sustainability Plans is for a Community Advisory Group to undertake development of the Plan. This group can consist of community leaders, government agencies, business leaders, Council, Administrative staff, etc. and can vary in size and complexity depending on the population, capacity and commitment of the community. In addition to building grass roots support in the community, a Community Advisory Group is also able to build capacity within the community amongst the various groups which will be critical to implementing the actions in the Plan. The Community Advisory Group can perform the bulk of the work in developing a Municipal Sustainability Plan; however, it needs to maintain continuous communication with Council and members of the public, through open houses, workshops, newsletters, etc. It is important to ensure that the process is transparent, collaborative and inclusive so that ongoing interest and support are maintained throughout the project.

Who gets it done?

We all get it done together. All stakeholders in the Municipal Sustainability Plan, including business leaders, community members, environmental interests, educators, youth, seniors, and government have a role to play in building and nurturing sustainable communities. Collaboration is key, from the grass roots of the community right up to the Governments of Alberta and Canada.

In the MSP process, however, it's the municipality that takes the lead. Municipal leadership can be demonstrated within the bounds of municipal jurisdiction, through planning, regulation, and spending on community services and capital improvements. Leadership can also be shown by influencing parties beyond municipal boundaries, jurisdictions, and immediate spheres of influence. The keys to unlocking the energy in our communities are found through breaking down traditional boundaries and finding out how we can all work together ***to discover innovative solutions that address social, cultural, economic, environmental, and governance challenges today while leaving a positive legacy for future generations.***

