Community Engagement Case Studies

The following case studies are an excerpt from a paper prepared for Columbia Basin Trust: Davis, S. (2010) "Moving Sustainability Forward: Public Engagement for Local Government Sustainability Planning in the Columbia Basin Trust Area". Unpublished Master's Report, University of Victoria, School of Public Administration. P. 44-50.

Several communities at different stages of public engagement around sustainability planning and one around an Official Community Plan, were consulted for CBT's Public Engagement research, to consider themes around strategies used, keys to success, and lessons learned. The communities were selected, by the researcher with advice from the client (Columbia Basin Trust), because of the variety and uniqueness of their approaches. The communities were also selected based on the relevance of their experience to the communities of the Basin; this meant several city examples were left out because their access to resources and scale of projects is very different.

St. Mary's Band- Aq'am, BC : *Ka Kniwitik* – "Our Thinking".

The Aq'am Community, St. Mary's Indian Band, is part of the Ktunaxa First Nation and is located near the City of Cranbrook. The Aq'am community has a population of 342 people of which a third are under the age of twenty-five. In 2009, the community elected the first new chief in thirty years and almost an entirely new Council.

St. Mary's is undertaking a strategic plan (a version of a Comprehensive Community Plan), similar to an integrated community sustainability plan. This plan is being coordinated by a young community member under the mentorship of an experienced consultant. One of the aims throughout the process is to build local capacity and skills of the entire community.

The process in St. Mary's is community driven. The local coordinator notes that the planning process is more about "uncovering" the strategic plan rather than writing it—that the community already has the knowledge and wisdom. The respect for the community by the project coordinator, the Band staff, and the Band Council has allowed the process to bring together the community. The coordinator emphasizes that it is the community's project, not hers and that she is learning with the community, which has built trust and teamwork. The coordinator notes that the community wanted change which has helped provide the support for the process. One of the objectives of the plan, as set by the Chief and Council, is to develop a framework for community led decision making.

St. Mary's is only part-way through their public engagement on their strategic plan and already have done significant public engagement. The first activities for the project were to have a public engagement brainstorming session and facilitation workshop for the Strategic Plan committee, the project coordinator, staff, Council. Special engagement sessions were held to engage youth and elders. The sessions created a venue for the development of the Ktunaxa name for the project—*Ka Kniwitik* meaning "Our Thinking".

The next phase of public engagement included multiple community meetings. Community members were encouraged to attend by having dinner served at meetings and draw prizes at each meeting and an entry each time an individual participated in the planning process for a large draw prize (a TV) drawn at the end of phase two. The meetings were designed to be fun, empowering, and interesting so that once people were enticed to join the meetings they wanted to stay and participate. Concurrently, during this phase, family meetings were held where the project coordinator would visit a family and bring food to cook together and discuss their vision for the community. Youth were specifically engaged in the process through a photography project for youth and children had many opportunities to draw and contribute in the community meetings. The public engagement also included visits to the schools and one on one meetings between youth and elders.

Throughout the community meetings and visioning process, a metaphor of a tipi was used to describe the strategy sustainability plan. The poles of the tipi represent the sectors of the community: health and education, land use, environment, culture and language, economic development and governance and the fabric represents the community's vision. The next phase of St. Mary's public engagement involves building an actual tipi with displays and opportunities to comment. This event is being designed as a community project that will allow the community to "build" the plan. Following the tipi building the community is taking a community trek which is hoped to bring the community together around the strategic sustainability plan and to be a celebration of the success of the project.

The thorough public engagement for St. Mary's strategic sustainability plan is still in progress but already demonstrates how a committed community with support from Council, staff, and the community can use public engagement around a sustainability plan to bring together a community. The focus on building capacity and connections within the community throughout the project will help with the implementation of the plan and with future initiatives and has helped grow the social capital within St. Mary's.

Slocan, BC

Slocan has the distinction of being one of the smallest incorporated municipalities in BC with only 350 residents. In April 2009, Springer Creek Wood Products, the mill and largest employer in the Village of Slocan announced that it was shutting down. Slocan appealed to the Province's transition team asking for help creating a transition strategy, as Springer Creek was also the largest taxpayer in the community. Slocan was able to start looking at opportunities that existed within a time of change.

With funding from the Province and CBT, Slocan hired a consulting firm to do a sustainability plan and a scenarios plan around the future of the mill. The sustainability plan aimed to do public engagement and identify assets for the community. So far the consultants have publicly engaged the community through three public forums that used the world café strategy. This strategy works by having a host at each table with a topic and having participants move between tables to discuss that issue.

Slocan used asset mapping as a way to identify opportunities and assets within the community. They even created a Google map that shows the local businesses, amenities, and public spaces.

While public events were well attended the consultants wanted to reach those who might not attend an evening meeting. They went to a community hub, the wellness centre and invited people to stop by and discuss the sustainability plan. The project also needed to engage the business community and so a business lunch, with food provided, was held for business owners. The business meeting used the analogy of a leaky bucket to discuss how to get people to spend money within the community, to "plug" the leak of money that leaves the community.

The extensive public engagement and positive community response really demonstrate the resilience of a small community facing a major economic challenge. This example shows that a community can pull together to look at a sustainable future in the midst of a challenge.

Golden, BC

Golden is a resort municipality of 4500 with some blue collar roots in the forestry and transportation industries (CP Rail and the TransCanada highway). Golden is located on the TransCanada highway in the Columbia River Valley and between Rogers and Kicking Horse pass. In 2000 the local ski hill was bought and developed into a major resort: Kicking Horse Mountain Resort.

Golden undertook a large public engagement process on the community's Official Community Plan which includes a number of sustainability elements. Golden is an example because of the public engagement and how the Official Community Plan has been used to promote sustainability. The researcher heard Golden referenced during the Basin interviews as an example that communities in the Basin already look to.

In interviewing staff from the Town of Golden it is clear that the OCP was determined a priority by the Council and that Council's support was a big factor in the success. The Town of Golden created a culture of trust by appointing an OCP steering committee that consisted of volunteers and one Councillor to guide the process. Advertising was creative with a photo of Golden's mayor made to look like the historic "Uncle Sam" posters saying "we want you!"

For the public engagement the steering committee and town planner supervised two coop students hired from the Golden campus of the College of the Rockies and gave them "free reign" to design and implement an engagement strategy. This culture of trust throughout the organization was a key to the success. The coop students were cheerful and approachable and went out into the community to engage citizens. The students set up big signs with "OCP event" and did public engagement in grocery stores, coffee shops, public skate, and jam night at a local pub. Golden did additional engagement using techniques like a design charrette where community members commented on designs with post it notes and open houses.

The Golden example shows that by establishing a culture of trust that embraced new ways of going to the people to publicly engage; the community will buy-in to the plan. Since Golden's OCP was adopted in 2008, the Council, even the newly elected Council, and staff have made an effort to show the community how the OCP that they helped create is being used. In Council meetings, newspaper articles, and at community events the phrase "this is your OCP in action" is reiterated to show that a new development that has affordable housing suites or a redevelopment of a community centre are all in line with the OCP. The implementation of Golden's OCP won the 2009 UBCM Innovation and Leadership award for small communities.

Golden's OCP blurs the line with a sustainability plan and contains many sustainability elements. The sustainability values from the OCP are placed in the Council chambers at the seat of each Councillor to ensure that decisions are made that reflect those values. Golden is still considering whether the OCP constitutes an integrated community sustainability initiative or whether to pursue a sustainability plan or checklist in the future. In the meantime the award-winning OCP continues to be put to action in Golden.

Rossland, BC

Rossland is a resort municipality of 3500 people within the Basin region. Rossland at one time was a gold rush and mining boom town. It is now a diverse community with a world-class ski resort and amenities

that attract tourists and amenity-migrants. Rossland was one of the first communities in BC to undertake a sustainability plan. Rossland's 'Visions to Action' plan was created out of a desire to look at sustainability due to the rapid development at Red Mountain. Their 'Strategic Sustainability Plan' evolved from earlier concerns raised by some community members in 2002 over the potential impacts of rapid development and change. A cost-benefit assessment of development was carried out in 2006. This assessment raised the broader issue of sustainability, and led to Rossland's Visions to Actions sustainability plan.

The Visions to Actions plan was led by a steering committee of volunteers, and municipal staff and council members. The steering committee worked with a Sustainability Task Force of fifty community members to do a number of public engagement events including workshops, surveys, target group sessions (seniors, youth, developers) and a design charrette. A major strength of Rossland's project was the degree and depth of involvement and participation by the community. Also a strong emphasis on creating a final product – the Strategic Sustainability Plan – that would be clear, concise and easy to read and understand.

One of the strengths of Rossland as an example community is that they are honest and open about their successes and challenges. Rossland faced challenges engaging developers in the sustainability plan and overcame them by having meetings specially targeted to developers and business people. Rossland also faced challenges of a volunteer driven task force working with a consultant. The volunteer members and contract manager of the Steering Committee ended up doing a lot more work than they originally anticipated. Also a scenario planning component of the project was not as effective as the Steering Committee had hoped due to misunderstandings of the role of scenario planning.

The Visions to Actions 'Strategic Sustainability Plan' (SSP) was adopted by Rossland's City Council in 2008 following almost two years of work. Unfortunately, the implementation was delayed while the community OCP was reviewed and revised to be consistent with the SSP, so some momentum was lost in moving to the all-important 'Action' phase of the process. Eventually the Council expressed its view on the priority issues or focus areas to be addressed, and, through a by-law, created a Sustainability Commission to succeed the Steering Committee and oversee the implementation of the SSP. Since then, the Sustainability Commission, which is a unique governance model, oversees four task forces that correspond to four of the eleven focus areas in the Visions to Actions SSP. The commission exists to maintain focus and continuity over time in the implementation of the SSP, and to coordinate projects, oversee the task forces, and vet ideas before they go to Council. This unique model has achieved several milestones such as a climate change adaptation plan, an indicators project, a watershed mapping project, and has completed an economic report on nomadic entrepreneurs. The Commission has also had some difficulties. A relationship with Council based on trust and confidence is key to the successful implementation of the SSP. The growing pains and struggles that Rossland has experienced with the Sustainability Commission by no means diminish the work that has been done, but rather show the challenges of maintaining momentum of a long-term project and implementing a complex, multi-sectoral concept like sustainability.

Rossland is an example community because of its successful engagement and it serves as an example of how a project evolves over time. Interviews with several individuals involved with the project over time (volunteers, councillor, and staff) indicate that there is some challenge with the Commission model; yet despite some growing pains Rossland has achieved important implementation milestones and is a leader in adopting a sustainability plan within BC.

Revelstoke, BC

Revelstoke is a resort municipality of approximately 8000 people. Revelstoke is known for its huge snowfalls and has a rich history closely tied to Canadian Pacific Railroad. The "last spike" that connected the westward railroad and the eastward railroad is just west of Revelstoke. The community is also home to the Revelstoke dam. The community experienced rapid development and a real estate boom with the development of Revelstoke Mountain Resort which opened in 2007. Real estate speculation raised house values significantly.

Revelstoke completed a new OCP in July of 2009 that had a lot of public engagement. The implementation of the OCP and subsequent bylaw updates continues to have a focus on public engagement. The unique neighbourhood groups and large scale design charrette are two reasons why Revelstoke was chosen as an example. Revelstoke is also a recognized leader in social planning, community energy development, and early childhood development.

Revelstoke's eight neighbourhood groups began in the fall of 2009 and meet monthly with planning staff. The neighbourhood groups are an opportunity for residents to connect with each other and raise their concerns to the City. This form of ongoing engagement at a neighbourhood level helped increase social capital in the community and for the both the City and the residents. The neighbourhood groups are a way for the City to get the word out on community meetings and other engagement.

Revelstoke is rebuilding trust in the community because of lack of engagement around development in the past. The renewed focus on public engagement in the midst of change due to substantial development and a new seasonal and sometimes transient population is animating discussions. Building off of Revelstoke's OCP, a new *Unified Design Bylaw* (UDB) is in the midst of public engagement. Revelstoke held an extensive four day design charrette that involved a variety of community member. A design charrette involves various stakeholders and community members giving ideas on designs for the community and artists or designers are drafting the ideas from the crowd. Then these drafts are revised throughout the event based on feedback from those in attendance. The ideal charrette, while time consuming and intense for the event, can potentially save months of debate and revisions by having all the players in the room making revisions and ultimately coming up with a collective decision.

The online site for the UDB, http://revelstokeudb.com/, has YouTube clips showcasing feedback from students that attended the design charrette as well as videos featuring other community members. The clips help explain the priorities and vision of residents as well as features experts explaining the process.

Revelstoke is an example of a community that is committed to preserving its community-feel and culture in the midst of major resort and real estate development. The use of a design charrette, neighbourhood groups and YouTube videos are examples of creative public engagement.

Williams Lake, BC

Williams Lake is located in the Cariboo region and has a population of approximately 11,000 people. It is known as the Stampede capital of BC. The T'exelcemc and Xat'sull Bands call the area home.

Williams Lake has undertaken a community-centered sustainability plan called "Williams Lake: Imagine Our Future" that involved a number of creative engagement strategies. Williams Lake started their sustainability plan in the summer of 2009 with a public event called Performance in the Park. At this public event, put on through a partnership between the City and the Community Arts Council, hundreds of citizens came out to watch live music and a chance to win a prize for participating in stations for the nine draft priority areas. These priority areas were identified through a review of previous City plans prior to the public engagement, and were subsequently confirmed by the public and one additional priority area was added to the planning exercise.

Williams Lake used multiple creative strategies to engage citizens around the sustainability plan. One of which was organizing kitchen table meetings, where a volunteer "host" invited friends to come and discuss the priority areas over the kitchen table. Another example of creative strategies to engage citizens was the community partner's café. Using social connections, members of the project team invited friends and acquaintances from diverse community organizations to a "conversation café" style meeting. The participants moved to different stations representing the now ten priority areas and had discussions. Another method Williams Lake used was having hot spots in different active community locations where community members could learn about the project and jot down their thoughts on a table top.

Williams Lake was not afraid to venture into the unknown. They created an event called "The Great Adventure" where families and community members participated in an Amazing Race style activity. The clues in the adventure led participants to community landmarks where they could comment on Transition strategies around each of the priority areas. In an interview, the project coordinator noted that overall the event was a success but if they were to do it again they would make the questions and expected feedback from the public simpler. The participants took each "stop" so seriously and were diligent in their comments that the event took longer that expected to complete.

The work in Williams Lake is a good example of being creative, making up your own events, and making things fun. The celebratory nature of the public engagement enticed people to come to events. Williams Lake's Integrated Community Sustainability Plan was so successful that it recently won the national 2010 Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Sustainable Communities Award under the planning category.

Jasper, AB

The municipality of Jasper with a population of approximately 4500 is located in Jasper National Park and has a large tourism based economy. The municipality and Parks Canada jointly undertook a sustainability planning process that involved several creative engagement opportunities. Jasper was chosen as it is not in British Columbia and yet has a similar size and tourism economy as several communities in the Basin.

While the municipality of Jasper is located in Alberta, its tourism related economy and mountain geography make it a relatable example for many communities in the BC Columbia River Basin. Jasper has the additional influence of being located within a national park which mirrors some communities within the Basin and the relationship local governments and regional districts have with Parks Canada.

The community of Jasper, AB kicked off the public engagement component of the Jasper Community Sustainability Plan in October of 2008. The event included an introduction to the project, guest speaker, and engagement through an "Activity Centre" with multiple stations. In one station participants could enter their feedback into computers; other participants could fill in a "brick" with ideas and place it in the pathway; and a visual art project for children. The event was designed to be fun with local musicians playing (Jasper Community Sustainability Plan (JCSP), 2008).

Within a week of the kickoff Jasper's Community Sustainability Plan Working Group hosted a **pecha kucha** night at a local bar. The pecha kucha strategy involves presenters sharing a 20 slide presentation with each slide on for 20 seconds (no more or less) meaning that each presenter spoke for 6 min and 40 seconds on ideas they had for the community or particular issues. In this event the key themes were the availability and affordability of housing; importance of land use planning; importance of citizen engagement; public and alternative transportation; tourism and local economic development; the natural environment; water, energy and waste; and opportunities for recreation and culture (JCSP, 2008).

The next events were workshops on sustainable tourism and creating a vision and goals. (JCSP, 2008). Following that, Jasper held workshops to create the vision and principles for the sustainability plan. These involved three exercises: Vision & Principles, Asset Mapping and Visual Cues, with the purpose of identifying key assets, opportunities, and challenges in the community. The strategies helped the community identify its vision and priorities as well as underlying concerns. (JCSP, 2008).

Goals for each sustainability area were developed through a public engagement workshop where sample goals were expanded by participants and the ninety participants over two nights voted with dots on their priority goals. Indicators were developed by consultants with less public engagement due to their technical nature and were evaluated by Municipal and Parks Canada staff (JCSP, 2009).

From their experience, Jasper notes "that investing in creating a public engagement plan was worthwhile because public engagement requires greater investment of time, effort and resources. Well planned events lead to increased buy-in from council and the community at large" (Sweet & Sacret, 2009, P. 37) Jasper learned that smaller sessions with local "experts" are effective and do not need to involve the entire community at every event. They note that smaller events do need to be reported publicly to maintain transparency. Jasper learned that while technology has potential as an engagement tool, it needs to be animated and note that if they did the project again they would have had a local blogger to keep online discussions lively and current. (Sweet & Sacret, 2009)