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Integrated Community Sustainability Planning —
Implications for Rural British Columbia

Report prepared by:

Joan Chess, BA, MA, MCIP, RPP

Sustainability Facilitator

Smart Planning for Communities, Fraser Basin Council

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Smart Planning for Communities

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to Angela Evans, MCIP, RPP, our dear colleague who helped create this project but sadly passed away in March of 2012.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Disclaimer:
The opinions expressed in this report are the author's, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Fraser Basin Council, the Smart Planning for Communities Program, and/or the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2010, the Fraser Basin Council's (FBC) Smart Planning for Communities (SPC) program was successful in applying to the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS), for funding for this research project. The research project investigated the application of integrated community sustainability planning (ICSP) by regional districts and small municipalities for rural areas of British Columbia. The three goals were to identify: 1) what makes a successful process for a rural area; 2) what actions are suitable for a rural sustainability strategy; and 3) the rural areas' relationship with urban and provincial sustainability goals.

First, in pursuing a successful ICSP process, the majority of respondents used a combination of in-house staff and outside expertise to conduct their process; and a majority developed their own process, with fewer using an established framework. Other key factors include having adequate financial and human resources. More specifically, other factors rated as being *very important* include *formal adoption of a final document and/or policies*, *community participation*, *commitment to implementation,* and *support from elected officials and community leaders.*

Under the Gas Tax Agreement in BC, local governments must demonstrate that they are applying the seven ICSP principles to all forms of planning at the local level, in return for receiving their annual per capita funding. There was consensus among all respondents that the seven ICSP principles are very suitable for rural areas and small municipalities in the broad sense, and are best suited when adapted to fit the particular circumstances of the rural setting. As well, the broad definition of 'sustainability' applies to rural areas the same as for urban areas; however the details would be different to reflect the rural context.

Second, in considering actions for a rural sustainability strategy, *protecting drinking water supplies* and *pursuing economic diversification* were most frequently chosen as being very important and realistic for implementation. As for how actions would be chosen for a strategy, three factors – *support from elected officials and community leaders, access to funding* and *implementation costs* – were identified as being very important.

There were notable differences between regional district and municipal respondents in identifying their top three priority actions. In addition to *protecting drinking water supplies*, regional district respondents chose *protecting agricultural land* and *preventing rural sprawl* as their top priorities. Municipal respondents chose *pursuing economic development* and *supporting higher density development suitable for a small town*, as their top priorities, in addition to drinking water.

Two particular findings emerged regarding possible rural sustainability strategies. In regards to Regional Growth Strategies (RGS), the survey responses indicated that there is no broad agreement either for or against using RGS as a basis for sustainability planning and strategies in rural BC. Further consideration and discussion would be needed regarding how an RGS process might be adapted to simultaneously serve as a rural ICSP process on a regional scale.

The next finding involves the related topics of agricultural land, urban sprawl and rural sprawl. Although many respondents did indicate that protecting agricultural land, and preventing rural and urban sprawl were important actions for a rural strategy, a good many other respondents indicated that these actions were of somewhat, less or no importance as part of a rural strategy. Similarly a good portion of respondents indicated that implementing these measures is somewhat, less or not realistic.

Separating the municipal respondents from the regional district respondents gives a slightly different picture. Those with regional districts gave agricultural land higher importance as part of a strategy; a high proportion chose it as one of the top three priority actions; and gave it higher ratings for being realistically implemented. However, a good proportion of respondents from regional districts also indicated that preventing urban and/or rural sprawl was somewhat, less and/or not realistic for implementation.

There was one notable difference between elected officials and staff. Staff rated *protecting agricultural land* proportionately more often as a top priority action (sixth on their list), than did elected officials (17th on their list). However, both groups were somewhat similar in their view that implementing actions to protect agricultural land, and to prevent urban and rural sprawl was less or not realistic as part of a sustainability strategy. Further study and discussion should be carried out to determine the underlying reasons, and more importantly, to find solutions.

The third research goal was to gain a sense of the role that rural areas have in the sustainability of BC's urban areas and in achieving provincial goals related to sustainability such as greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions and energy efficiency. The survey results clearly indicate that local governments in rural BC are mainly concerned about their rural areas and small municipalities. Helping urban areas even those within their region, and/or helping to achieve provincial goals related to sustainability, do not appear to be primary motivating factors in developing the rural strategies.

During the focus groups, participants often acknowledged their regional urban centres as being important for things such as specialized health care, shopping and services. In contrast, urban areas rely on rural areas and rural residents for many things; for example, hydroelectricity, oil, natural gas, food, timber, minerals, water, and outdoor recreation; as does BC's economy.

Local government participants identified decision-making and jurisdictions, as significant factors in their ability to make their communities more sustainable. Three areas in particular - natural resource development, health care, and education – are crucial to rural communities' well-being; none of them are within local government's jurisdiction.

Lastly, this research project generated a number of recommendations, based on the collective input from the participants, and reflecting their knowledge and experience in rural BC. The recommendations address the three goals of the research: 1) identifying what makes a successful process; 2) what are suitable actions for a rural strategy; and 3) what is the rural areas' role regarding urban and provincial sustainability.

A successful ICSP process for rural BC will use the following tools:
- o technical leadership from a combination of in-house staff and outside experts
- o an appropriate planning process developed by the local government and residents
- o the seven ICSP principles, adapted in ways meaningful to their rural situation
- o a budget securing the financial and human resources
- o demonstrated support from elected officials and community leaders
- o formal adoption of the final document and/or policies by the Council or Board
- o a demonstrated commitment to implementation
- o a community participation strategy with fun, creative and varied approaches, and
- o research to identify residents' values and the reasons they choose to live a rural lifestyle and in the places they do.

A rural sustainability strategy would likely include the following primary actions:
- o protect drinking water supplies
- o pursue economic diversification
- o encourage health and social well-being, and
- o support locally-owned small businesses;

as well as these secondary actions:
- o develop walking and/or bicycling routes
- o promote water conservation
- o support volunteerism and community spirit, and
- o support community organizations.

Choosing the most appropriate actions for a rural sustainability strategy will be primarily based on:
- o support from elected officials and community leaders
- o access to funding, and
- o costs of implementation.

Perhaps the most critical ingredient to success was best stated by one focus group participant: 'The plan has to be believable and the public has to believe that it can be accomplished'.

In conclusion, through this research project, rural local governments across BC have shared their knowledge, experiences and perspectives as to how ICSP processes and strategies can succeed in their areas. Success is built upon adapting broad sustainability concepts and principles, planning processes, and strategies to reflect their communities' and regions' unique rural circumstances; as well as paying attention to the practical details of human and financial resources, and support from elected officials and the community. Ongoing support from other orders of government is needed for planning, for the many local governments who have yet to apply the ICSP principles and/or begin an ICSP process. Support from other orders of government will also be crucial particularly for implementation, along with a collaborative approach to address the jurisdictional issues and concerns raised.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the Fraser Basin Council's (FBC) Smart Planning for Communities (SPC) program was successful in applying to the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS), for funding for this research project. The research project investigated the application of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) by regional districts and small municipalities for rural areas of British Columbia. The project's time frame was February 1, 2011 to July 31, 2012.

Most rural areas of British Columbia have population and employment growth rates that are a small fraction of the rates occurring in the urban and fringe areas of the Lower Mainland, southern and south-eastern Vancouver Island, and the Okanagan. Indeed most of northern BC except the northeast region, has experienced population declines – in some cases as much as 20% - over the past 10 to 15 years. Many sustainable community tools address growth management and livability in growing urban regions, for example urban densification and public transit, and by definition have limited relevance in most rural or resource dependent communities.

Broadly speaking, the research is needed for BC because:
o   the economy, services, land uses and physical forms in rural and urban areas are vastly different
o   applying ICSP principles to local planning processes is required for both municipalities and regional districts as local governments under the Gas Tax Agreement[1], as well as helping them to meet climate change targets, policies and actions required by the BC Local Government Act
o   most research, experience and tools in BC regarding sustainable communities have been developed for and taken place in cities and urbanized settings experiencing high growth rates; and
o   local governments in rural areas of BC need a made-in-BC approach to sustainability planning for rural communities, and especially those experiencing little or no growth, or declining populations.

This lack of information about sustainability planning for rural BC fits well with PICS' research goals. One of PICS' five research themes is sustainable communities, in which one of two research priorities is:

> exploring the elements of a sustainable community, including densification, mixed land use, a net-zero energy system and a diverse local economy, and determining how to get there through planning and policy development …[2]

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[1] "The Canada-British Columbia-Union of BC Municipalities Agreement on the Transfer of Federal Gas Tax Revenues" delivers federal funding to local governments and others for eligible capacity building projects, including ICS Planning, as well as to public transit, community energy, water, wastewater or solid waste infrastructure projects that contribute to reduced greenhouse gas emissions, cleaner water, or cleaner air.

[2] http://pics.uvic.ca/research/sustainable-communities

1.1 Literature Review

The need for this research project was reinforced by the results of the literature review. The literature review[3] was conducted by a university student on an internship with the FBC. As requested, the student " … examined literature that would be relevant to development and implementation of Integrated Community Sustainability Plans and/or Processes at a Regional District level in rural regional districts of BC" (Whitehead, May 2011; p.2). The student reviewed three regional districts' Regional Growth Strategies, of which one also had a sustainability strategy. The review also found papers from Ontario and Alberta, the United States and Australia, and the European Union.

The student researcher had difficulty in finding relevant community sustainability planning projects or plans, for areas similar to that of rural BC, elsewhere in Canada or the world, especially at the regional scale. Many rural sustainability projects and available literature are for areas with higher populations, smaller geographical area, and generally much closer to large or metropolitan cities. There are few places with such a small and dispersed population, for which similar work has been done and recorded.

Further challenges arose in finding documents of processes that have a similar broad-based integrative nature as that of ICSPs and their processes. There are many specific individual "pieces to the puzzle" such as agricultural plans, water management plans, or peri-urban plans, all at a regional scale, from BC, Canada and Europe. Relevant academic papers tended to be of a more theoretical nature and useful in identifying the general characteristics of good regional management. They set a goal to reach for integrated management, but do not focus as much on the specific methods to achieve such goals.

The most relevant materials found are the regional integrated plans from Australia. The geographic and demographic characteristics of many Australian regions are similar to those in rural BC, although the Australian plans were a result of major coal mining development. There is the opportunity to look more closely at some of these plans and the methods used in their development, for their relevance to BC. Further study could also include Scandinavian countries which may have regions with similar characteristics as well as a similar climate to BC.

1.2 Scope

British Columbia is a huge province, with extremely diverse ecosystems, landscapes and human settlements. Thus the project's scope had to encompass this scale and diversity, while maintaining the focus on rural BC. The parameters of this project are as follows:
o   All regional districts in BC except Metro Vancouver
o   All electoral areas and member municipalities within the above regional districts, except for those designated by Statistics Canada as Census Metropolitan Areas (pop. 100,000 and over) and Census Agglomeration Areas (pop. 10,000 to 99,999), based on the 2006 Census,
o   Elected officials, senior administration staff and planning staff in these regional districts
o   Elected officials, senior administration staff and planning staff in member municipalities with populations of 10, 000 or less, as of the 2006 Census; and

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[3] Nigel Whitehead. " Initial Literature Review for the 'Integrated Community Sustainability Planning: Implications for Rural BC' Project"; unpublished student paper, UNBC; May 2011.

o Practitioners, academics and/ or consultants involved with delivering ICSP processes for small municipalities, regional districts and/or rural areas.

The project had initially anticipated including First Nations governments and their elected officials and staff, from the same area as the defined regional districts. However, in the early stages, it became apparent that including First Nations governments would add large numbers of individual governments, as well as the inter-jurisdictional complexity, which would exceed the capacity of the staff and the timeframe for the research project. Planning for First Nations communities falls under federal jurisdiction, and they were not included in the Gas Tax Agreement. Moreover, planning with First Nations communities and governments is deserving of its own research, particularly in regard to comparing traditional knowledge with sustainability principles. During the research project however, many local government participants identified that working with their adjacent First Nations governments and communities is important to them.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of the research as stated in the original proposal is to answer the following question:

What are the measures of success for BC's regional districts, which encompass rural areas … and incorporated municipalities, when engaging in an ICSP process and implementing the resulting strategies in pursuit of becoming sustainable communities?

The question reflects the two main components in this research project:
- o the planning process (what steps, how), and
- o implementing strategies (what actions, how).

To rephrase the question in a more detailed way, if BC's regional districts are to be successful in ICS Planning and their rural communities and landscapes are to become sustainable, then
- o What are the elements of a successful process for rural areas and communities, for example data and information, public awareness and participation?
- o What tools are suitable for a 'rural tool kit', which can be used by regional districts in developing and implementing their sustainability strategies?
- o What role do regional districts, rural communities and landscapes have in supporting the sustainability of BC's cities and urban areas (eg. food, recreation, water), including a regional district's member municipalities as well as those elsewhere in BC?
- o What role do regional districts, rural communities and landscapes have in supporting province -wide sustainability goals, in all aspects – social, environmental, economic and cultural?

The anticipated outcomes of the research project are information and practical advice for BC's regional districts concerning:
- o the elements of a successful process for their rural areas, including engaging with neighbouring First Nations and the regional district's member municipalities
- o the tools and actions – a 'sustainability strategy tool kit' – available to regional districts for implementation, and
- o a better understanding of the role that regional districts, rural communities and landscapes have in supporting the sustainability of BC's cities' and related provincial goals particularly regarding climate change.

1.4 Definitions

This research project uses the definitions listed below.

Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP)
Several communities in BC had begun to apply sustainability thinking to their local planning in the early 2000's. However, Integrated Community Sustainability Planning was formally established in 2005 as part of the Gas Tax Agreement among the federal, provincial and local governments, which provides the following definition:

> "**Integrated Community Sustainability Planning**" means long-term planning, in consultation with community members, that provides direction for the community to realize sustainability objectives it has for the environmental, cultural, social and economic dimensions of its identity …" (p.6).

In BC, the signing parties to the Gas Tax Agreement agreed that local governments are required to apply the seven ICSP principles or elements (below) to their planning, and may conduct a separate ICSP process. It is optional to produce a separate overarching plan. Instead, the results of applying the sustainability principles and/or planning process may be captured in other documents such as bylaws, policies, or an Official Community Plan. This approach was deemed acceptable to fulfilling the Agreement, in return for local governments receiving their per capita funds (Canada-BC-UBCM Dec 2007; pp3-4).

The ICSP process was also discussed in a background paper by the former BC Ministry of Community Services. The paper describes the elements or principles that are emphasized in this approach:

> *Long-term thinking* – planning and/or plans are future oriented to enhance community sustainability (e.g. communities address the need to become resilient in the face of changing circumstances).
> *Broad in scope*– planning or plans consider the communities' environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability.
> *Integration* – planning processes or plans reflect a co-coordinated approach to enhance community sustainability through linkages between different types of plans or planning activities.
> *Collaboration* – planning processes engage community members and other partners to support community sustainability (e.g. First Nations, neighboring communities, NGOs, private sector, other levels of government).
> *Public engagement and education* – designing processes that enhance public input into planning processes.
> *Implementation* – keeping plans off the shelf and putting them into action.
> *Monitoring and evaluation* – setting targets and tracking results to celebrate progress and focus efforts on areas that need the most improvement.[4]

The research explores the suitability of these principles for rural BC.

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[4] Ministry of Community Services. 'The Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) Initiative', February 2007.

Sustainability

There are numerous definitions of 'sustainability'. The Fraser Basin Council defines sustainability as "Living and managing activities in a way that balances social, economic, environmental and institutional considerations to meet our needs and those of future generations." [5] A commonly used definition is adapted from the 1987 Brundtland Commission report - Our Common Future - chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland when she was the Prime Minister of Norway; "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland 1987, p.24).

These needs encompass all aspects of human life – social, economic, environmental and cultural – which in turn must be balanced or integrated into a sustainable whole. The concept is often illustrated as being four legs of a stool, or a series of nested eggs. As seen in the following chapters, these elements of sustainability were included in the survey questionnaires and focus group sessions, as well as being tested as to whether these common definitions work for rural areas.

An example of sustainability is considering an economic system through the social and ecological consequences of economic activity. A sustainable economy involves ecological economics where social, cultural, ecosystem, health, and monetary or financial aspects are integrated. Moving towards sustainability is also a social challenge that entails many elements such as: local to international law, urban planning, transportation, local and individual lifestyles, and ethical consumerism. Ways of living more sustainably can take many forms; from re-organizing living conditions (for example eco-villages, eco-municipalities, sustainable cities), reappraising economic sectors (such as permaculture, green building, agriculture) and professional practices (such as architecture, engineering), to using science to develop new technologies (for example renewable energy), and making adjustments in individual lifestyles to conserve natural resources.

Rural

This project uses one of Statistics Canada's four definitions of rural. Rural and small town is defined as "… the population living in towns and municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres (ie. outside the commuting zone of centres with population of 10,000 or more)." [6] This definition means populations living outside Census Agglomerations with populations of 10,000-99,999, and Census Metropolitan Areas with populations of 100,000 or more.

While this Statistics Canada definition was applied as closely as possible, the researcher acknowledges that there may be some instances in which it inadvertently may not have been precisely applied, for several reasons. First, the project used the 2006 Census because the 2011 Census only occurred during the same year as the survey. Thus there may have been a few municipalities that had grown beyond 10,000 residents during those five years. Second, it is difficult to determine a commuting zone, as that depends on individuals' particular employment and living situations, as well as transportation options. This uncertainty was particularly relevant to southern Vancouver Island and the Okanagan. However, both regions were included in the research as both contain large rural areas, with a well-developed agriculture sector.

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[5] Fraser Basin Council. "Charter for Sustainability", February 1997.
[6] Statistics Canada. "Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin", Vol.3, No.3 (November 2001).

Although this project has selected the above definition of rural, it acknowledges that 'rural' is not a straightforward concept. There are many definitions and no one definition is universally accepted. In addition to such obvious characteristics such as size and location, a definition of rural may also include other factors such as transportation links, level of public services, and relative remoteness. A community's remoteness – how near or far it is – from other communities, and thus services and resources, is often part of being 'rural'. Difficult terrain may also play a role; for example sole access roads through mountain passes or having to cross ocean inlets, reservoirs or large lakes.

Most people agree that 'rural' includes northern communities, because much of the Canadian North is sparsely populated and very isolated. Others believe that some remotely located cities, which may not fit the initial definition of rural, are in fact rural in terms of geographical isolation, economic and labor force characteristics, and access to service and amenities.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODS

The research used two methods:
o   surveys and
o   focus groups.
The Research Project Advisory Team provided advice in developing the methods. The team members consisted of three academics from the University of Northern BC; three regional district staff members, one each from the Kootenays, the Central Coast, and northern BC; and the SPC Program Manager.

A description of each method follows.

2.1 Surveys

The main research method was a questionnaire survey, using the online software Survey Monkey. Two surveys were developed: one for local government elected officials and senior staff; and one for experts in community sustainability planning comprised of academics, consultants and practitioners. Both surveys were tested by several individuals, and finalized with their feedback. The local government survey ran from mid-September to late October 2011. It was intentionally scheduled to occur before the local government elections in November, to capture the knowledge and experience of elected officials who had served at least the previous three years. The experts' survey ran from mid-January to late February 2012.

For local government, steps were taken to ensure that all rural areas and regional districts (except Metro Vancouver) throughout the province were given the opportunity to participate. The request to distribute the invitations to participate was sent by e-mail to the regional associations of the Union of BC Municipalities: the North Central Local Government Association, Southern Interior Local Government Association, Association of Kootenay Boundary Local Governments; or directly to the regional districts, as was the case for Vancouver Island and the Fraser Valley. In turn, the regional districts were asked to distribute the invitation to the list provided of their member municipalities with populations of 10,000 or less.

In all cases, the researcher asked that the invitation be distributed to all Mayors and Councils, Chairs and Board members, and respective senior staff. In some regions, the invitation included particular First Nation Chiefs and Councils, and respective staff, which had incorporated under BC's Local Government Act. As well, information was posted on Civic Info.[7]

Distributing invitations for the experts' survey was more difficult, as there is no parallel organization for this group as there is for local government. Instead, the researcher developed a list of contacts such as universities with related sustainability and/or planning programs, individual consultants, and consulting firms. Using the 'snow ball' method, the invitation requested the individual to pass it along to others they knew, who also worked in the field.

Local Government Survey
The questionnaire consisted of an introduction and three sections of questions (see Appendix 1). The introduction provided an overview of the research project, background information on the Gas Tax Agreement and ICSP, the definition of rural, directions for completing the survey,

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[7] CivicInfo BC is an information service for those who work in, or are affiliated with British Columbia's local government sector; provided primarily through its web site (www.civicinfo.bc.ca).

and a statement of confidentiality. The first section asked questions about the respondent and her/his local government; for example are they an elected official or staff, and whether they are with a municipality or a regional district.

The second section asked questions about the community sustainability planning process, beginning with asking what stage their local government had reached. Depending on their answer – completed, underway, not started – respondents were led to the next appropriate set of questions. For local governments that had completed or were underway with a process, questions were asked about who was or is conducting the process; and if they had or were developing their own process or using an established framework. Other questions probed the importance of a variety of factors and the level of success. For those local governments who had not yet initiated a process, respondents were asked to rate a variety of factors for their importance in making a decision to proceed or not.

Also related to the planning process, respondents were asked to rate the suitability of the seven ICSP principles for rural areas and small towns, and whether there are additional principles that are better suited for rural compared to urban areas. Other questions asked about the relevance of Regional Growth Strategies to sustainability planning.

The third section focused on sustainability strategies and the kinds of actions that local governments might choose in developing a strategy to become more sustainable. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a variety of actions, and to identify their top three priorities. While a range of actions is possible, there is always the element of how realistic it is that these actions would be implemented. Thus respondents were asked to rate how realistic it is that various actions would be implemented; and the importance of various factors in choosing actions appropriate for rural sustainability strategies.

Experts Survey

A second survey was developed for academics, consultants and practitioners (collectively called 'experts) in sustainability planning with rural areas, small municipalities and regional districts (see Appendix 2). Similar to that for local government, the survey consisted of an introduction and three sections.

The first section asked about their background (for example an academic, a consultant); their area of expertise, and the regions in BC in which they have done such work. The second section asked questions about the sustainability planning process:
o   what factors are important for success
o   what measures or indicators would be useful in determining success
o   what changes would they anticipate seeing locally if a process was indeed successful
o   the suitability of the seven ICSP principles for rural settings, and
o   the relevance of Regional Growth Strategies to rural sustainability planning.

The third section focused on sustainability strategies. As with the first survey, the intent was to determine the types of actions that are suitable for rural strategies. The questions asked respondents to rate the importance of various actions; how realistic is it that these actions would be implemented; and lastly the level of importance of various factors in choosing actions for a strategy.

2.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups allow in-depth discussion and provide a level of detail not possible with on-line surveys. Similar to the survey, invitations were distributed through local governments throughout BC, open to both regional district, municipal, and where applicable First Nations representatives whose governments are also incorporated as a local government through provincial legislation. The sessions were limited to ten participants each, to ensure that everyone had the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. The invitation was open to elected officials and senior staff. Those who had participated in the survey in particular were encouraged to attend. Although individuals had to sign-up, their identity was kept confidential; no names or locations are attributed to the input received.

Six focus groups were held between late February and late April 2012 throughout BC. Three were held in person and two were held using an online conferencing format, through the internet and teleconference. The first session was held as a test pilot, in conjunction with a conference. The focus group format and questions were adjusted based on this first experience. The online conferencing format was extremely useful for accommodating BC's vast, sparsely populated regions and avoiding the costs and time for travel.

Each focus group was facilitated by staff from the Smart Planning for Communities Program. The session opened with a presentation on the research project, followed by a set of questions that mirrored the online survey. The feedback was captured on flipcharts or in notes, and forwarded to the research project manager for analysis.

The focus groups were not made available to individuals who had participated in the survey for experts. While initially it was intended that they would be invited, there was no way of knowing which individuals had participated in the experts survey or where they were located. As well, the number of respondents in the experts survey was quite small compared to the number participating in the local government survey.

3.0   RESULTS

3.1 Local Government Survey

As described in Section 1.2, the research project was initially focused on regional districts and their participation in conducting ICSP processes, since they have jurisdiction over the unincorporated rural areas in BC. The small municipalities were a secondary rural focus. However, the number of respondents to the survey from small municipalities far outnumbered those from regional districts. This result is logical given that there were many more small municipalities (104), than regional districts (27) invited to participate. Thus the sections below report the overall survey results, as well as breaking out regional district responses where appropriate in the paper.

The reader is cautioned that the results reflect the respondents' answers regardless of their affiliation, and do not represent individual incorporated regional districts or municipalities. As well, for the figures in the following sections, the data labels have been shortened in most instances for ease of constructing the graphs. The full wording is used in the text, and may also be found in the questionnaires themselves in the appendices. The data presented in the graphs using Likert scales have been sorted, using Microsoft Excel software, from the most to the least number of responses for each of the possible response categories.

3.1.1 Participants

Of the 132 respondents, 32% were elected officials and 68% were staff; 21% were with a regional district and 79% were with a municipality. The Kootenays as a region had the most participants (both staff and elected) – almost one-third of all respondents - and almost twice as many as Vancouver Island/Mid-Coast BC, the region with the second greatest number of participants.

As shown in Figure 1, approximately 18% of all respondents had completed an ICSP process, while another 19% had a process underway. Almost half of the respondents - 47% - had not yet started a process; 15% did not know the status for their local government.

Figure 1. Stage of ICSP Process Reached
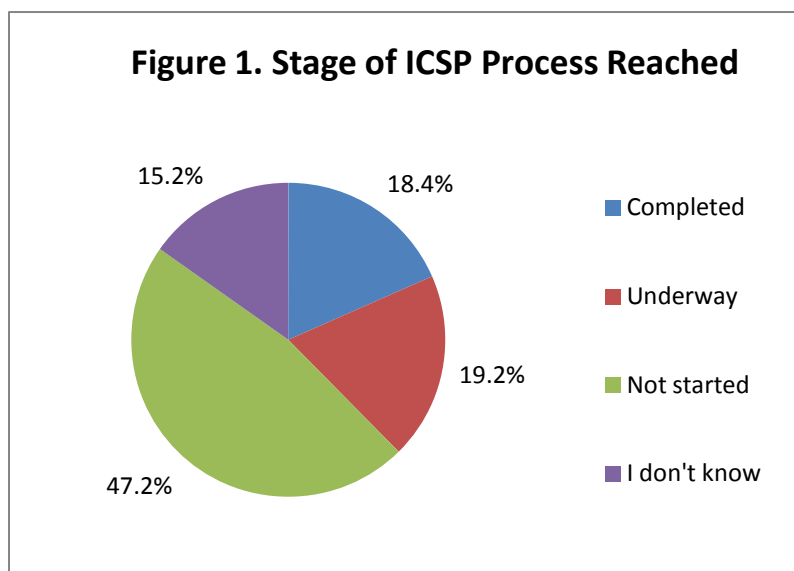
3.1.2 The ICSP Process

As described above, the survey was structured according to the status of their sustainability planning process; whether it was completed, underway, or not yet started.

<u>ICSP Process Completed</u>

As shown in Figure 2, 62% had used *a combination of both* outside experts and in-house staff to conduct the process, and 33% relied on *outside experts.* Figure 3 shows that 57% *developed own planning process* and 38% *used an established framework*.

Figure 2. Source of Assistance for Conducting Process - ICSP Completed

0.0%
33.3%
Outside experts
In-house staff
Combination of both
I don' know
61.9%
4.8%

Figure 3. Approached Used for Process - ICSP Completed

4.8%
Developed own
38.1%
Used established framework
57.1%
I don't know
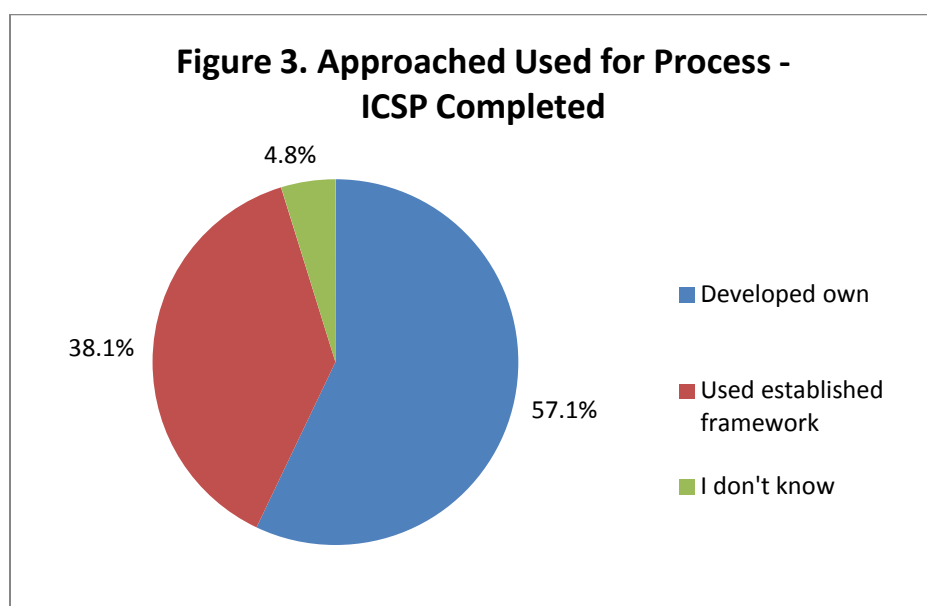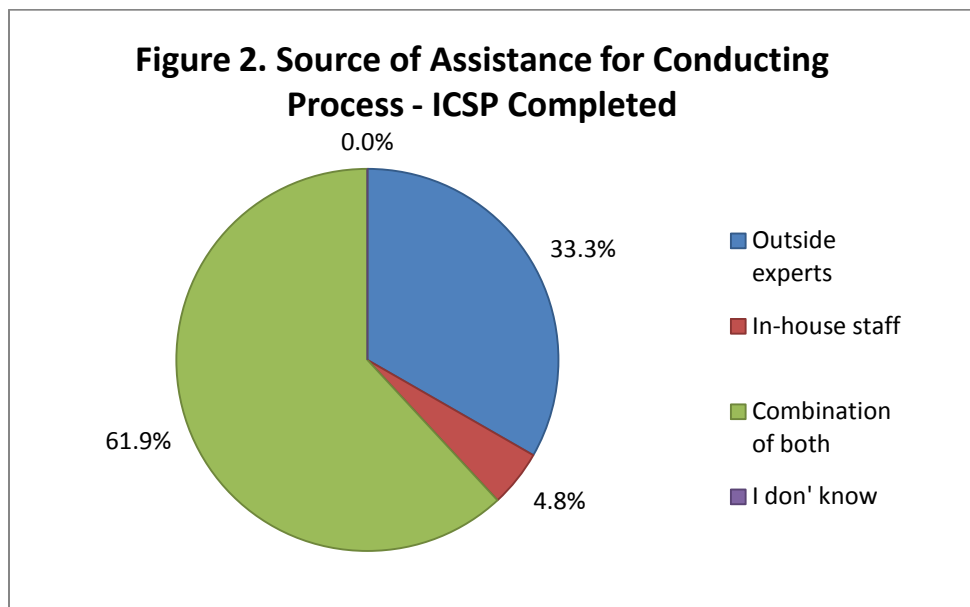
One of the main objectives of the research was to determine the factors important to achieving a successful process and thus outcome for rural local governments. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a number of factors. As shown in Figure 4, almost all of the factors were rated as being *very important* or *important* to having a successful process. The factor rated most often as being *very important* was *formal adoption of a final document and/or policies*, followed closely by *expertise (staff, outside experts and/or volunteers)*. None of the factors were rated as being *not important*, and few were rated as being *less important*.

Figure 4. Level of Importance of Factors for a Successful Process - ICSP Completed
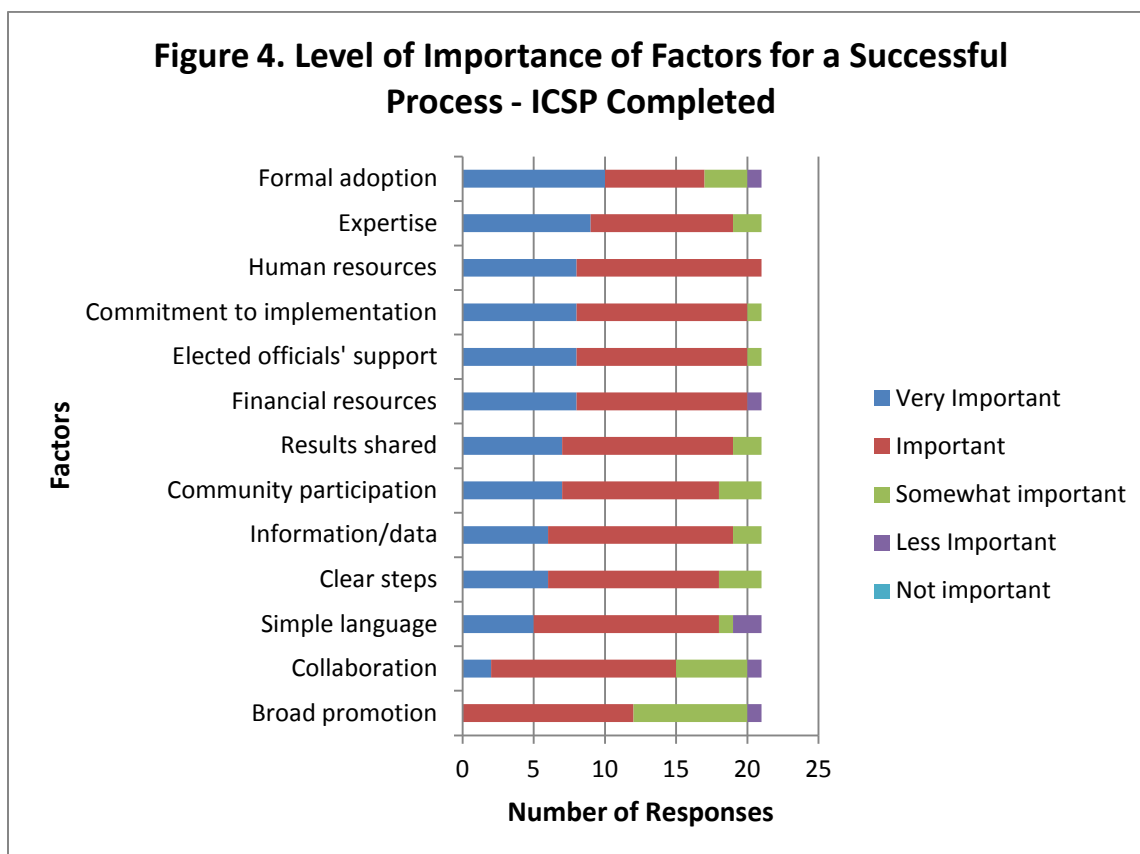
Respondents were then asked if they could do it over again, which factor would have made the greatest improvement to the process. A *commitment to implementation* was the most frequent response, followed by *human resources (staff, outside experts, and/or volunteers)* and *collaboration with orders of government, agencies, and community organizations*. As well, over 80% of respondents rated their process as either *very successful* (38.1%) or *successful* (42.9%). Finally, most indicated that the ICSP process had either *significantly* (38.1%) or *somewhat significantly* (38.1%) changed their local government in such things as daily operations, decision-making and/or attitudes.

ICSP Process Underway
An almost equal number of respondents had an ICSP process underway, as those who had completed their process. They were asked similar questions.

Slightly over half (52.4%) were using *a combination of both* outside experts and in-house staff to conduct the process, with an equal number using *outside experts* (19.0%) or *in-house staff*

(19.0%). Similarly, 52.4% were *developing own planning process*, with 23.8% *using an established framework* and 23.8% indicating *I don't know*.

These respondents were asked to rate the importance of various factors to their process (Figure 5). A majority of them rated all the factors as being *very important* or *important*. The factor rated most frequently as being *very important* was *financial resources* (66.7%), followed closely by *community participation* (61.9%).

Figure 5. Level of Importance of Factors for a Successful Process - ICSP Underway
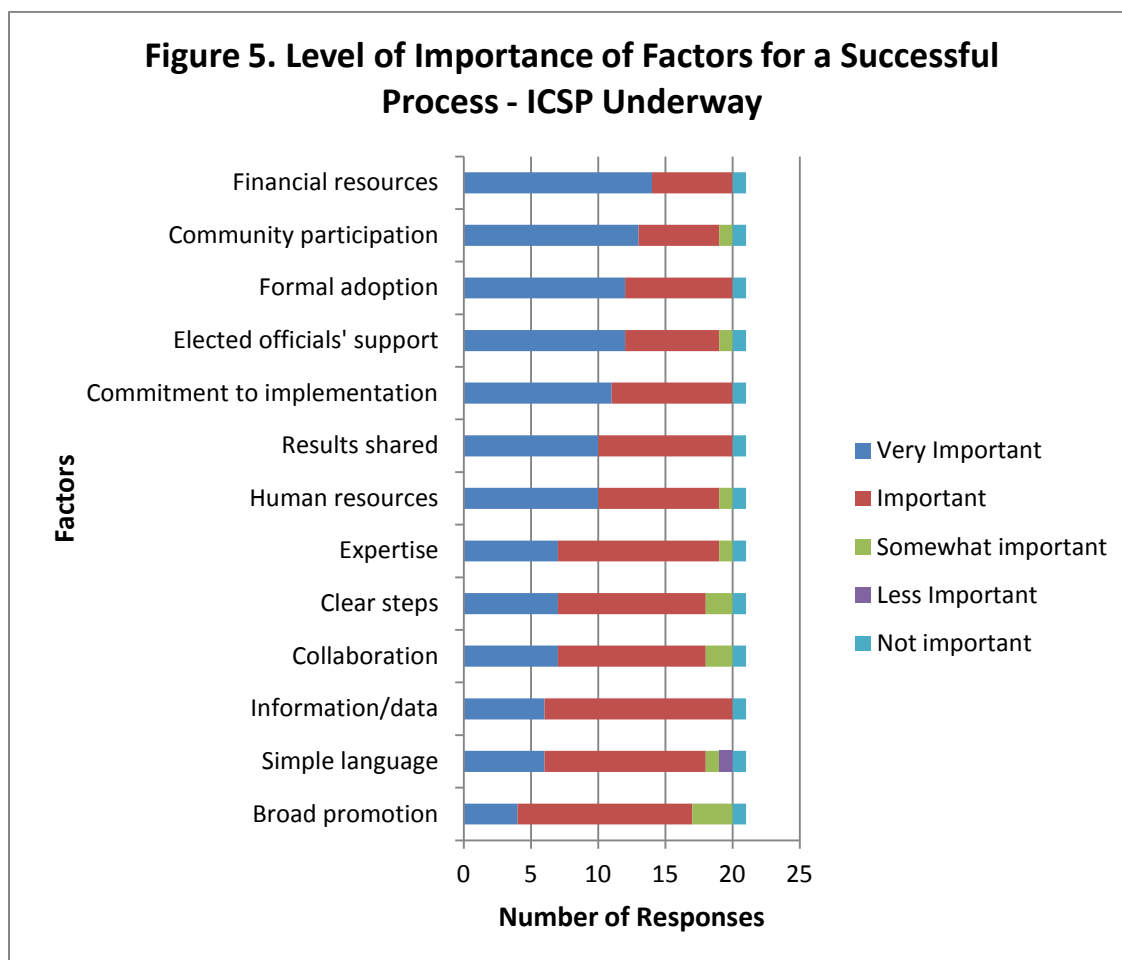
This group was also asked, if they could adjust something, which one thing would make the greatest improvement to their process. The most frequent factor chosen was *financial resources* (38.1%).

ICSP Process Not Started

Almost half of all survey respondents were from rural local governments which had not started an ICSP process. This group was asked about the importance of various factors in making a decision to proceed with such a process or not. As shown in Figure 6, most respondents rated all the items as being either *very important* or *important* to making a decision. *Financial resources* was rated most frequently (60%) as *very important*. The next most frequently rated as *very important* were *usefulness (worthwhile doing)*, *human resources (staff, outside experts, and/or volunteers)*, and *commitment to implementation*.

Figure 6. Level of Importance of Decision Making Factors - ICSP Process Not Started
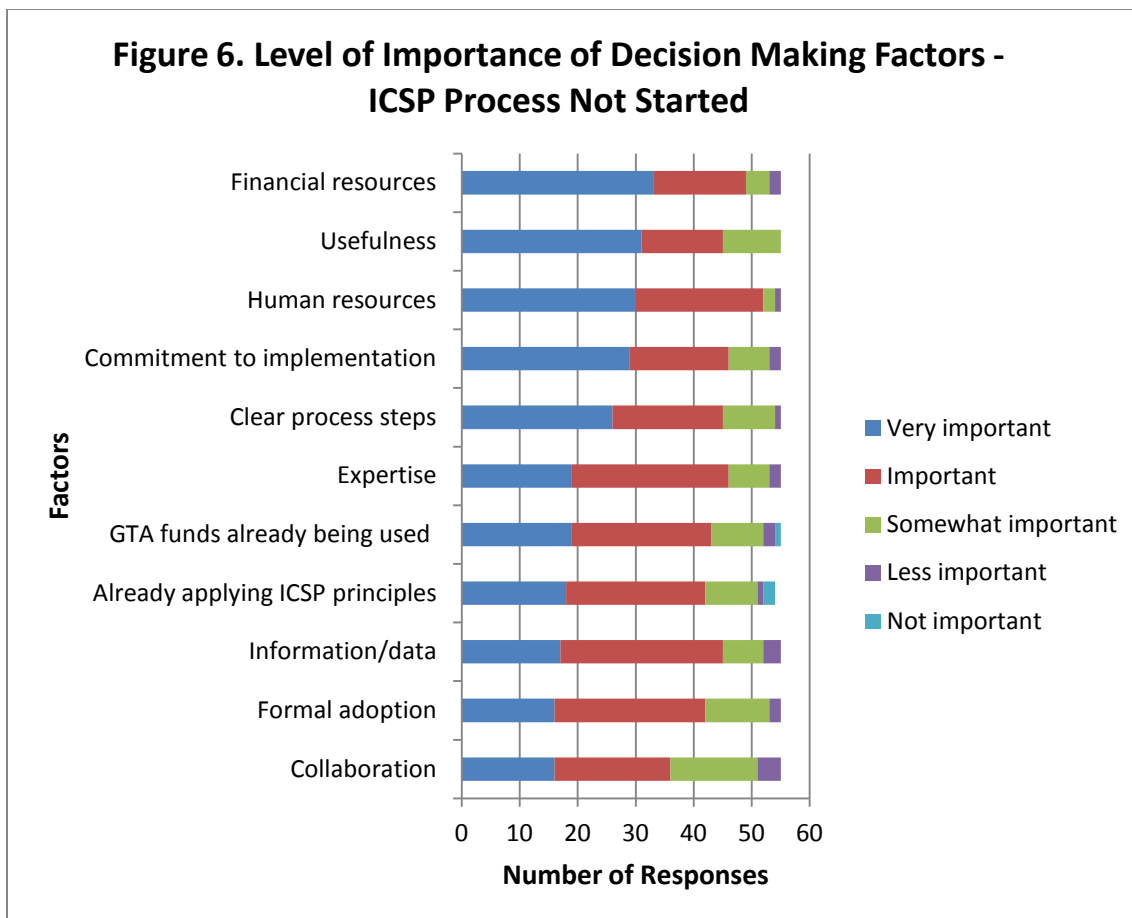
Lastly, if the local government was considering proceeding with an ICSP process, they were asked about the level of support from elected officials and from residents and community leaders. The response (Figure 7) was almost unanimous that such support was rated as *extremely important* or *important.* However, respondents appear to place more weight on support from elected officials than from community leaders. *Support from elected officials* was rated as *extremely important* by 65.5%, and *support from residents and community leaders* was rated as *important* by 56.4%.

Figure 7. Level of Importance of Support in Making Decision to Proceed - ICSP Process Not Started
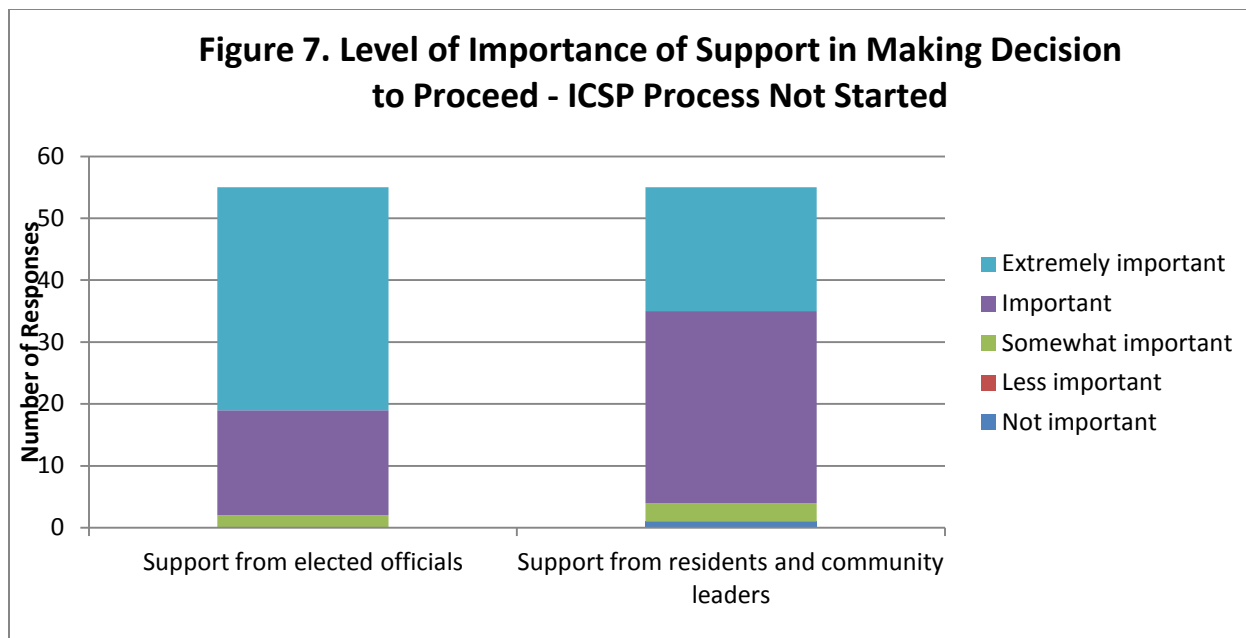
3.1.3 ICSP Principles

Under the Gas Tax Agreement in BC, local governments must demonstrate that they are applying the seven ICSP principles to all forms of planning at the local level, in return for receiving their annual per capita funding. Given that the principles are stipulated by the Agreement, it was important to know if they are suited to BC's rural areas. Almost all respondents indicated that the ICSP principles were either *very suitable* or *suitable* for their rural areas (Figure 8). In fact, one-half to two-thirds of all respondents rated all seven principles as *very suitable*.

Figure 8. Level of Suitability of ICSP Principles for Rural BC
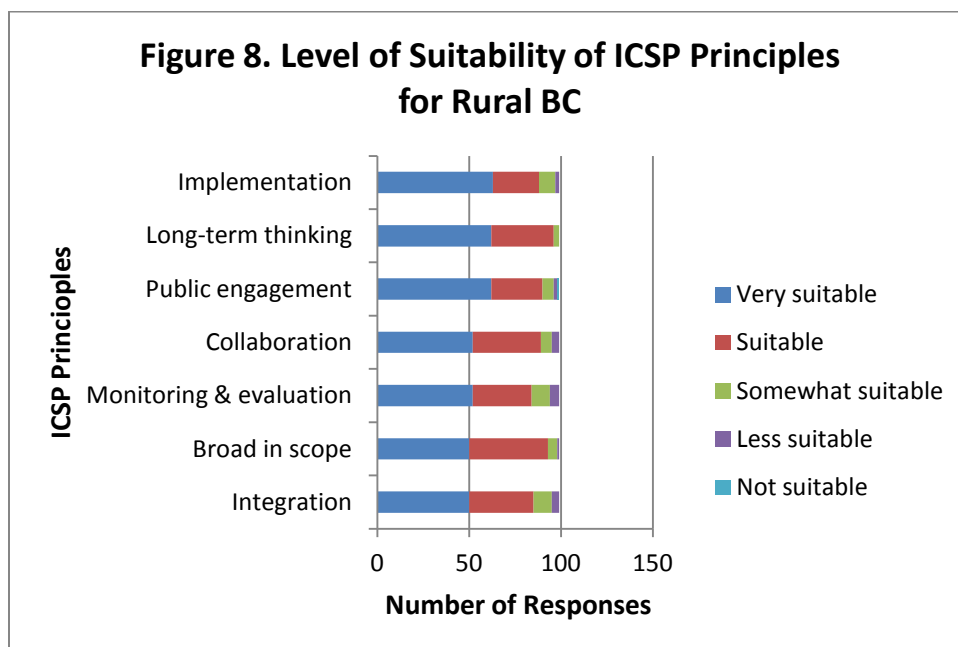
When asked if there were additional principles that are better suited for rural areas, compared to urban, 35% responded yes. Of these 33 suggestions, one-third (10 responses) cited the need to be practical, locally relevant and aware of rural circumstances, in everything from developing plans and policies, and especially in implementation. This latter aspect is of course reflected in the ICSP principle of *implementation*.

The next grouping of suggestions encompassed the ICSP principle *broad in scope*. The respondents identified three specific topics: economic development (particularly natural resource-based industries), environment (water), and transportation - revealing their importance to them. Another three respondents identified public participation and communication suited for rural residents, which falls within the principle *public engagement and education.* A final grouping of comments focused on inter-jurisdictions, which would be included in the principle of *collaboration*.

3.1.4 Regional Growth Strategies

Regional Growth Strategies (RGS) were introduced under the Local Government Act in 1995 to enable regional districts to conduct regional planning and manage growth, including the unincorporated rural areas as well as with the member municipalities. Section 849 lists 14 objectives for an RGS, which are complementary to the concept of sustainability. The research project asked respondents from regional districts whether their RGS reflected ICSP principles. The responses ranged almost evenly among *very well* (9.1%), *well* (10.1%), and *somewhat* (12.1%); with the most frequent being *I don't know* (23.2%). Almost 40% of the regional district respondents did not have an RGS.

3.1.5 Sustainability Strategies

The second main objective of the research project was to determine what actions make sense in a sustainability strategy for rural areas, as compared to those that might be used in an urban area. This section presents the results from all respondents, followed by comparisons between municipalities and regional districts, and between local government elected officials and staff.

Respondents were asked how important are a number of actions as part of a sustainability strategy for their rural areas. Although not meant to be an exhaustive list, these actions were chosen for the survey because they are commonly found in strategies and plans prepared by BC local governments of varying sizes. As shown in Figure 9, the action most frequently rated as *very important* was *protecting drinking water supplies* (80%) followed by *pursuing economic diversification* (60%). Conversely, other actions that were rated most frequently as being *less important* and/or *not important* included *preventing urban sprawl* and *pursuing a district or community energy system*.

Figure 9. Level of Importance of Actions for a Rural Sustainability Strategy
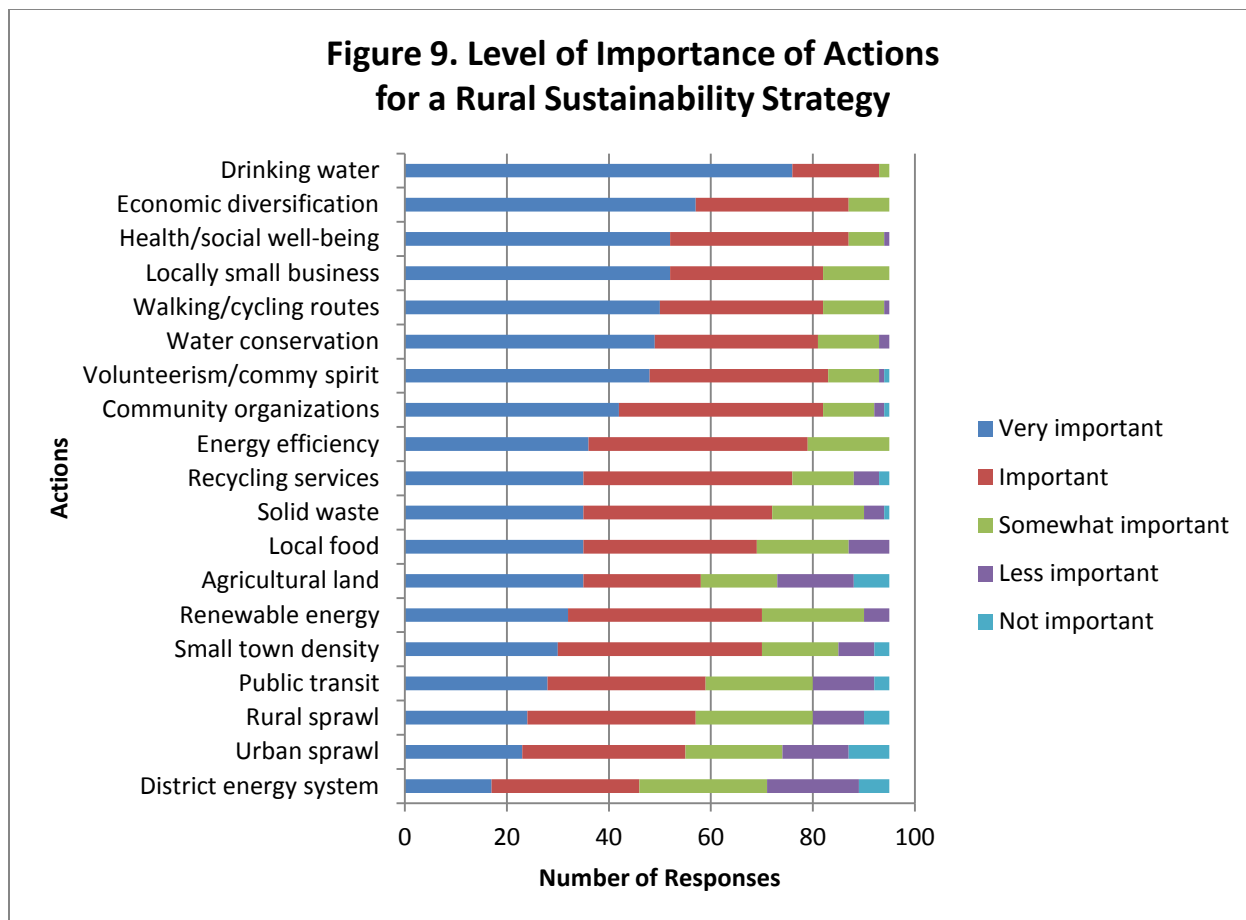
From the same list above, respondents were asked to name their top three priority actions for their rural area. Two actions were selected by almost half the respondents as being a priority: 1) *protecting drinking water* (48.4%), and 2) *pursuing economic diversification* (46.2%). The third action was a tie between *supporting locally owned small businesses* and *supporting higher density development suitable for a small town* (both with 22%).

The responses above indicated that many survey participants consider the range of actions important in developing a rural strategy. A parallel question however, is how realistic is it that these same actions would actually be implemented. As shown in Figure 10, the result was consistent for the first priority action – *protecting drinking water supplies* - where implementation was most frequently chosen as being *very realistic* (51.6%). However, the other two top priority actions were farther down the scale, receiving ratings from *very realistic* to *somewhat realistic*. Many of the actions were rated as *realistic* for being implemented.

In contrast, a number of actions were seen as being *less realistic* or *not realistic* for implementation. *Developing a district or community energy system, protecting agricultural land,* and *preventing rural sprawl* received the most responses in these two rating categories, followed by *providing public transit* and *preventing urban sprawl*.

Figure 10. Level of Realism for Implementing Sustainability Strategy Actions
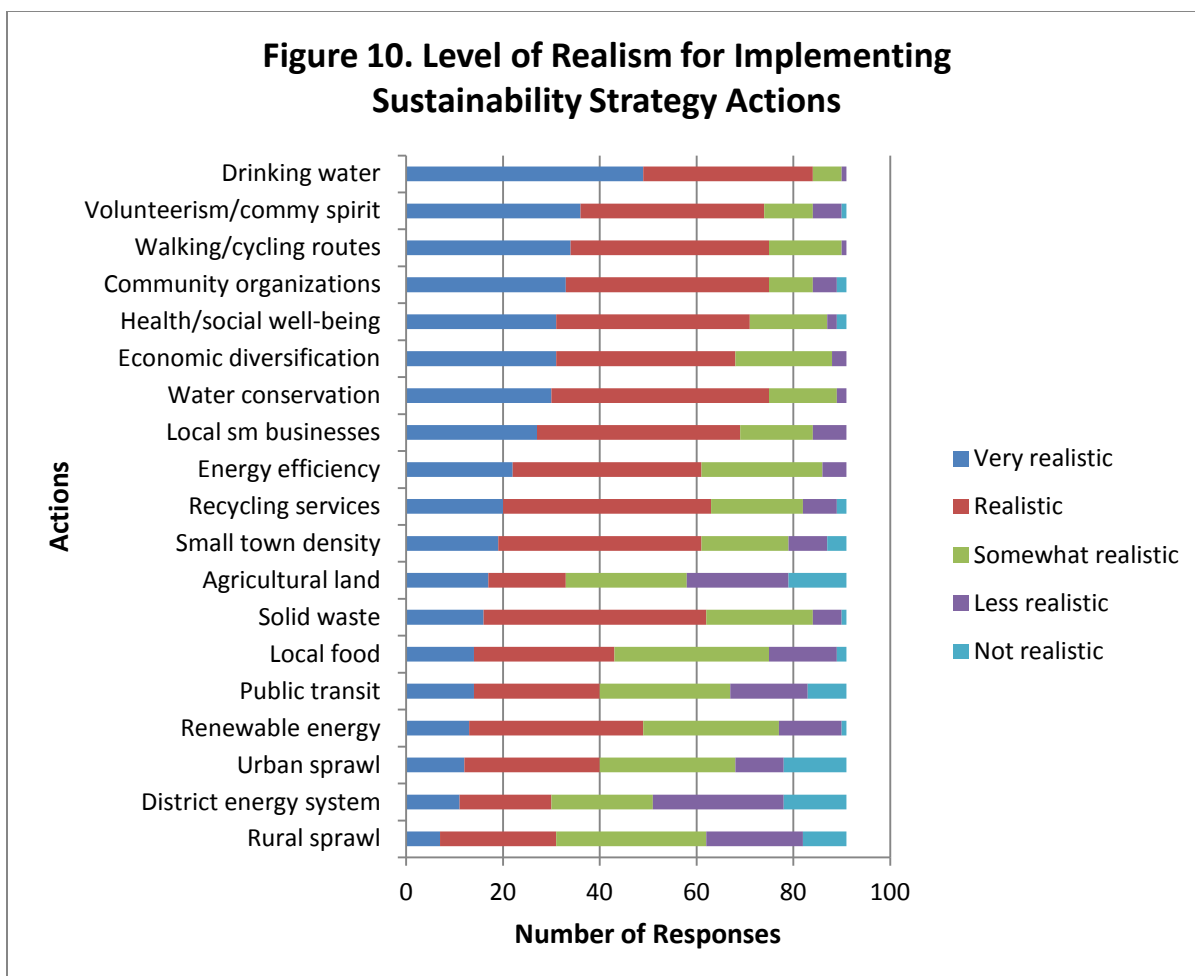
A major challenge for rural local governments is considering the many factors involved in choosing appropriate actions. As shown in Figure 11, two factors were selected by most respondents as being *very important*: *support from elected officials and community leaders* (78.9%) and *access to funding* (77.9%) - followed closely by *implementation costs* (74.7%).

In comparison, the factors chosen most often as being *less important* or *not important* were: *helps urban areas in my regional district and/or the province; proximity to urban areas,* and *contributes to provincial sustainability goals*.

Figure 11. Level of Importance of Factors in Choosing Actions
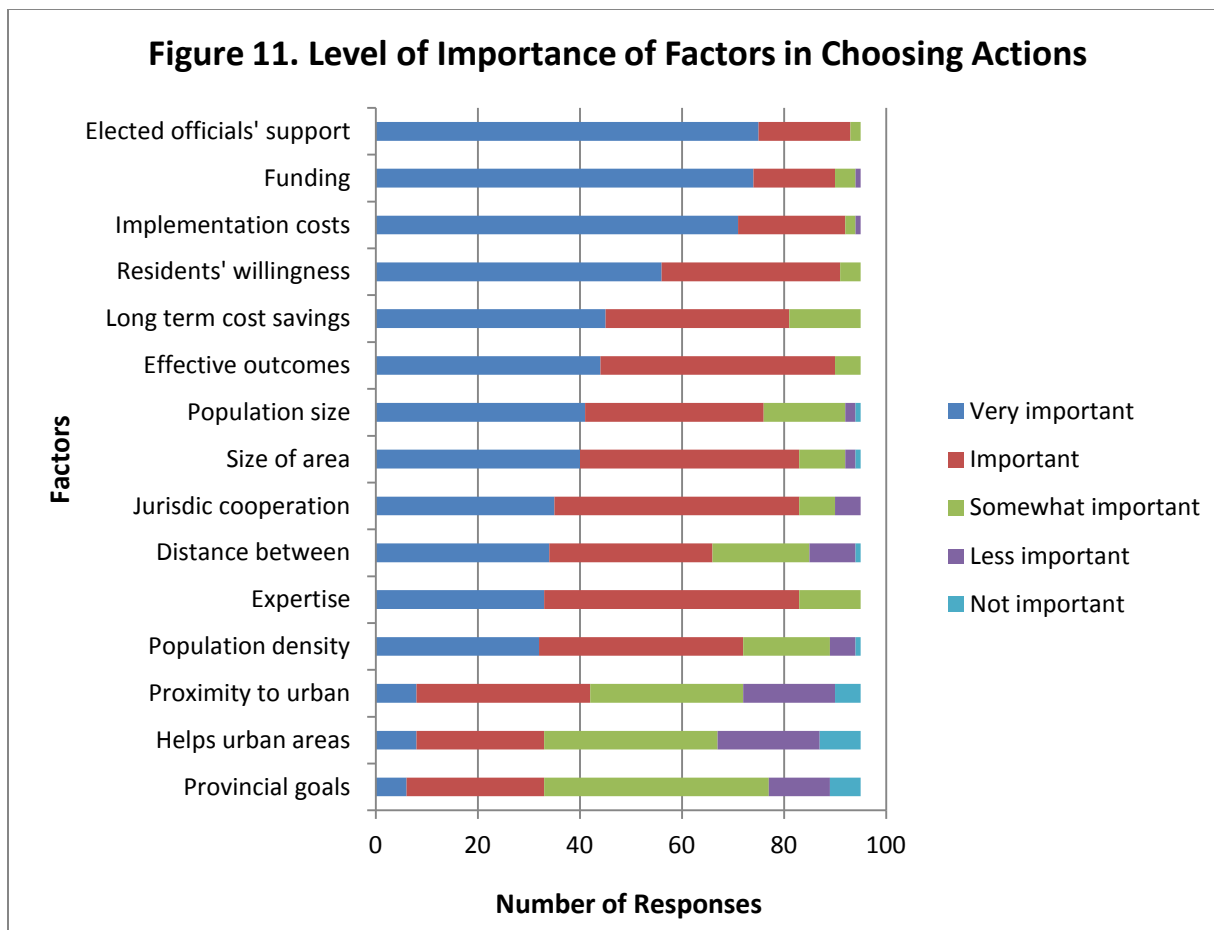
Comparing Regional District and Municipal Respondents

A cross-tabulation was conducted to compare the responses between those from regional districts and those from small municipalities, specifically in regards to developing and implementing the sustainability strategies. A caution is offered to the reader in reviewing the graphs below. The number of participants from small municipalities (104) was far larger than those from regional districts (27). As well, while this ratio mirrors the number of local governments in each category that received the invitation to participate - 27 regional districts and 104 municipalities – not every local government invited was represented among the respondents.

For those from small municipalities (Figure 12), the top three actions were, in order: *pursuing economic diversification, protecting drinking water supplies,* and *supporting higher density development suitable for a small town*. Of note, the first two actions were selected by almost half of the municipal respondents.

For those from regional districts (Figure 13), the top three actions in order were: *protecting drinking water supplies, protecting agricultural land,* and *pursuing economic diversification* tied with *preventing rural sprawl*. Again of note, the first two actions were clearly preferred by the regional district respondents, over other choices.

Figure 12. Top Three Priority Actions - Municipal Respondents

Figure 13. Top Three Priority Actions - Regional District Respondents

Actions	Percentage of Respondents
Drinking water	50.0
Agricultural land	44.0
Rural sprawl	31.0
Economic diversification	31.0
Other	25.0
Health/social well-being	25.0
Local sm businesses	19.0
Water conservation	19.0
Energy efficiency	19.0
Local food	19.0
Walking/cycling routes	12.5
Urban sprawl	12.5
Volunteerism/commy spirit	6.0
Public transit	6.0
Small town density	6.0
Community organizations	0.0
Recycling services	0.0
Solid waste	0.0
District energy system	0.0
Renewable energy	0.0

In addition to *protecting drinking water supplies*, other similarities between the two groups include actions such as *pursuing economic diversification, supporting locally owned small businesses, promoting water conservation,* and *encouraging health and social well-being.*

However, there were major differences between the two in rating priority actions. For example, *protecting agricultural land* and *preventing rural sprawl* were more often selected as priorities by regional district respondents but not by municipal respondents. Conversely, *supporting higher density suitable for a small town* and *encouraging volunteerism and community spirit* were selected more often as priorities by those from municipalities than those from regional districts. And five actions were not selected at all by regional district respondents.

The ratings for how realistic it is, that the various actions would be implemented, were compared as well. As shown in Figure 14, municipal respondents rated most of the possible

actions as being *very realistic* and *realistic* for implementation, mirroring their selection of actions for a strategy. The actions most frequently chosen as being *less realistic* or *not realistic* for implementation include: *preventing rural sprawl, protecting agricultural land, preventing urban sprawl,* and *developing a district or community energy system.*

Figure 14. Level of Realism for Implementing Actions - Municipal Respondents
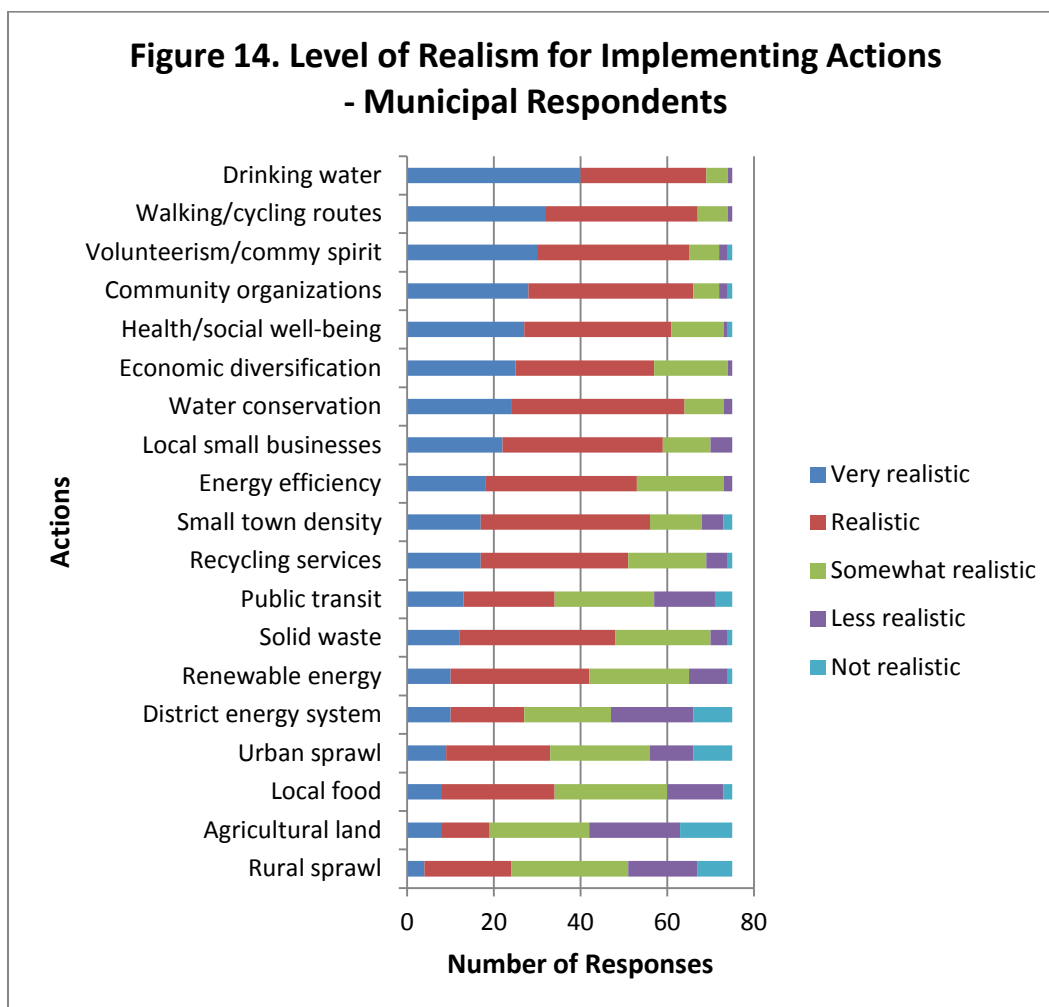
As shown Figure 15, regional district respondents gave ratings across the scale for many of the actions, from *very realistic* to *not realistic* for implementation. Compared to their municipal counterparts, regional district respondents indicated more of the actions as being *less realistic* or *not realistic* for implementation; for example *promoting and/or providing recycling services, promoting water conservation,* and *supporting food security and local producers.*

Figure 15. Level of Realism for Implementing Actions - Regional District Respondents
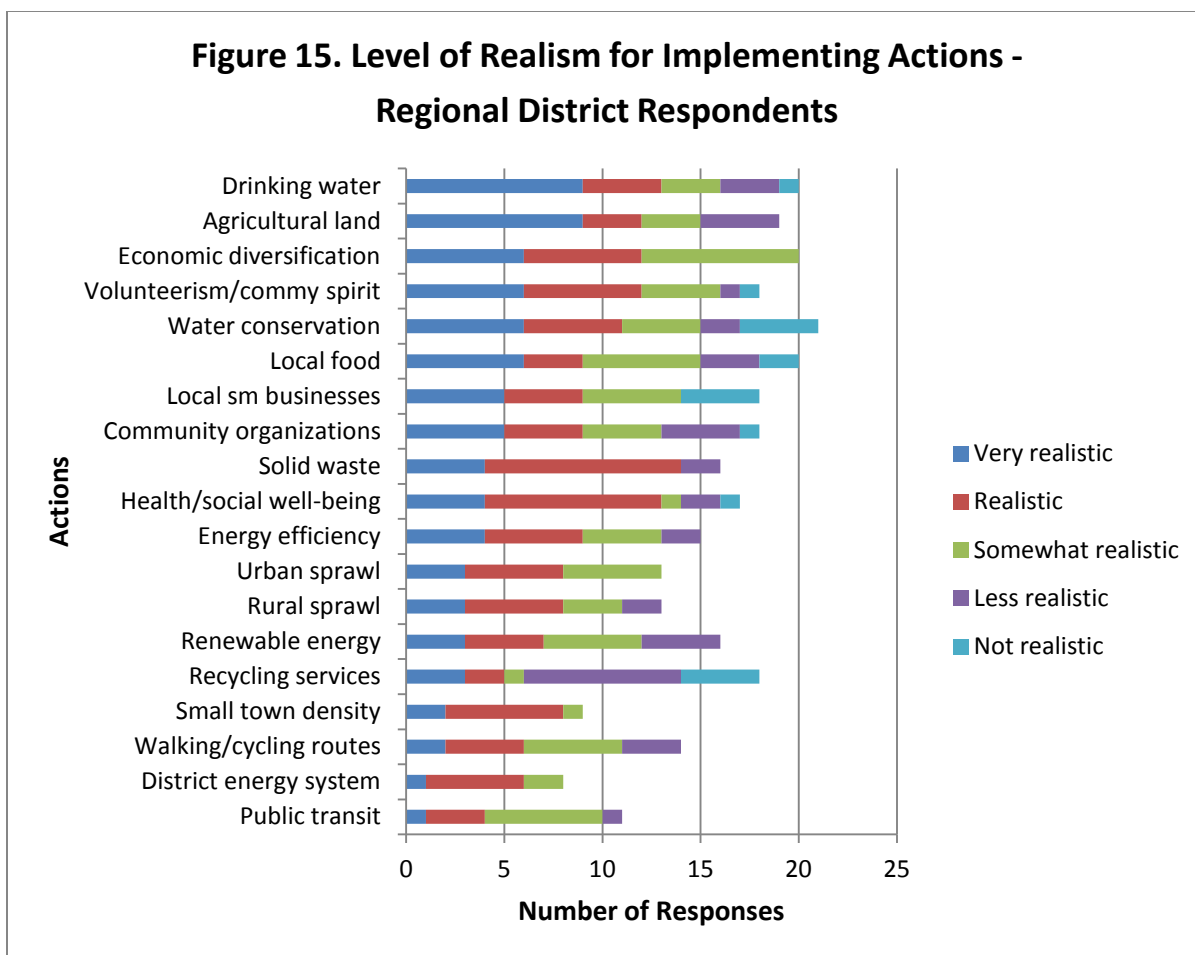
A third comparison between municipal and regional district respondents was conducted regarding the importance of various factors in choosing actions suitable for a rural sustainability strategy. As shown below (Figure 16), most of the factors were rated by municipal respondents as being *very important* and *important* in selecting suitable actions. More specifically, the factors selected most often as being *very important* were in order: *access to funding, support from elected officials and community leaders,* and *implementation costs.*

Some of the factors rated frequently as being *very important* and *important*, also received ratings as being *somewhat important* and *less important*; for example *implementation costs, residents' willingness,* and *long term cost savings.* Three factors - *helps urban areas in my regional district and/or the province, proximity to urban areas,* and *contribution to provincial sustainability goals* – appear to be seen as much less important overall, as they were the least frequently selected as being *very important* and/or *important*.

Figure 16. Level of Importance of Factors in Choosing Actions - Municipal Respondents
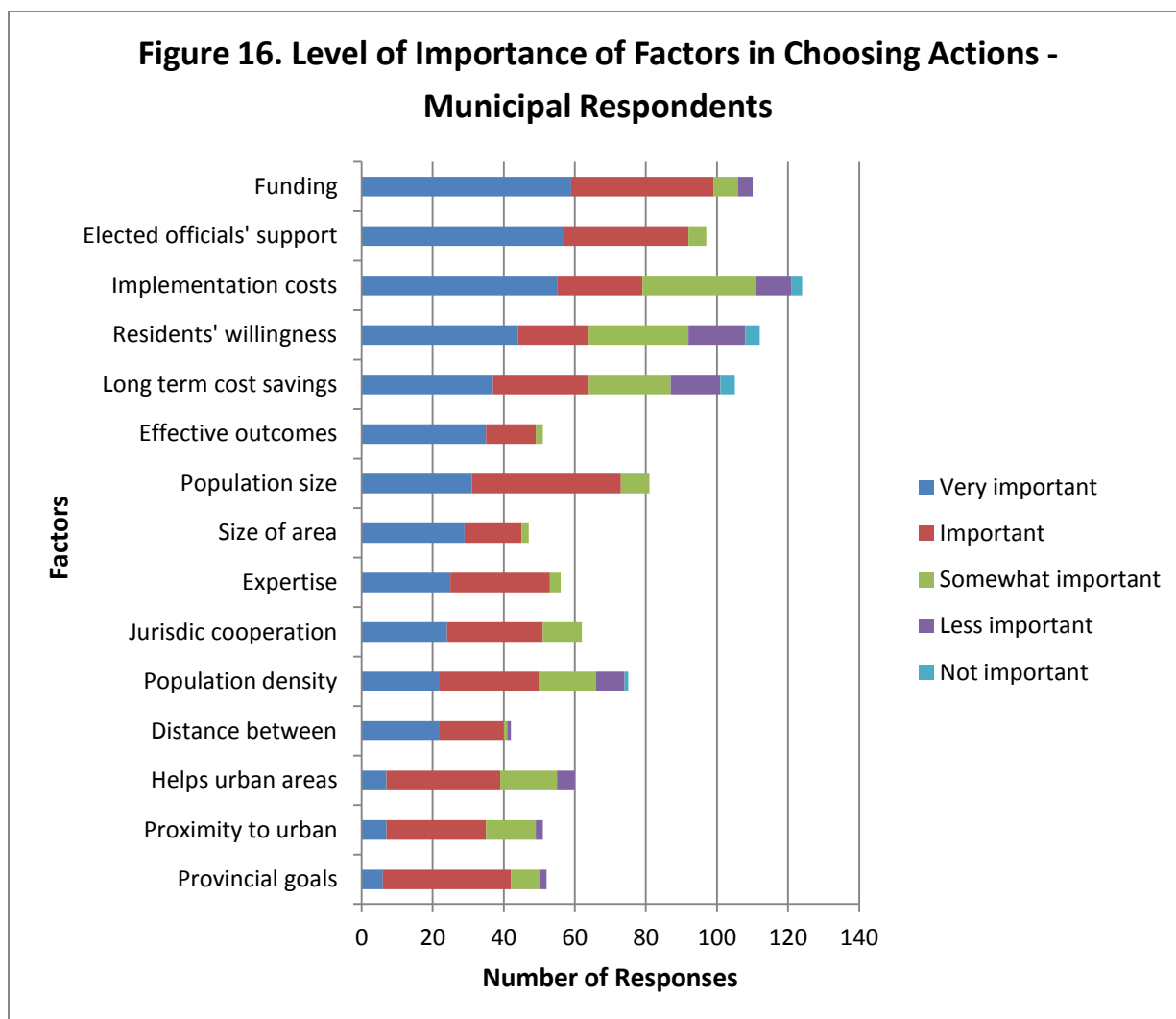
Regional district respondents gave similar results as those from municipalities (Figure 17). Regional district respondents rated almost all of the factors as being *very important* and *important.* The factors rated most often as being *very important* were in order: *support from elected officials and community leaders, implementation costs*, and *access to funding.*

Similarly, regional district respondents rated the same three factors - *helps urban areas in my regional district and/or the province, proximity to urban areas,* and *contribution to provincial sustainability goals* – as their municipal counterparts, as not being important in selecting actions. However, those from regional districts were far stronger in their response, by indicating *less important* and *not important* more frequently for these factors, than those from municipalities.

Figure 17. Level of Importance of Factors in Choosing Actions - Regional District Respondents
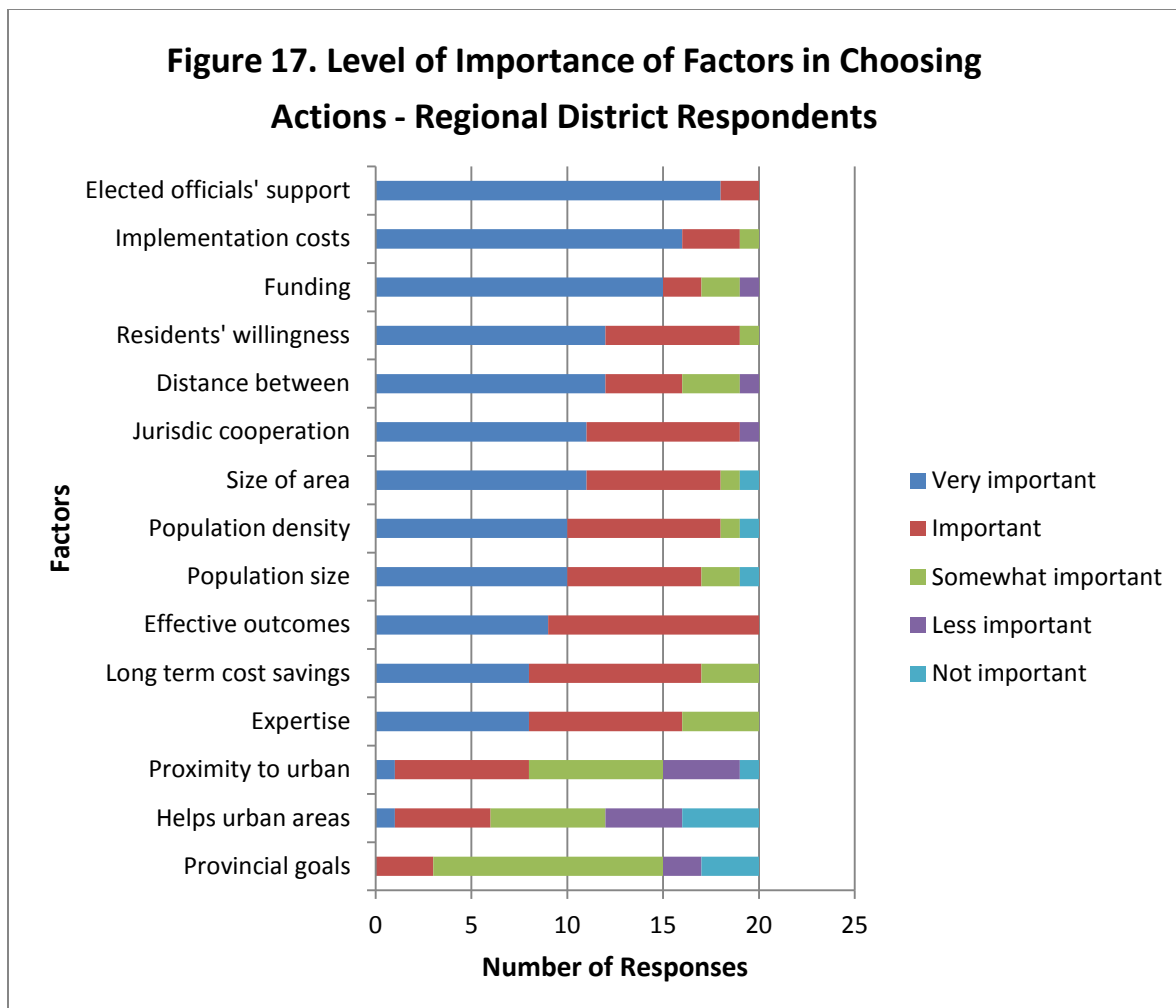
Comparing Elected Officials and Staff

A second cross tabulation was conducted to compare the responses from the local government elected officials and staff. As with the above comparison between the two forms of local government, this second cross tabulation focused on the questions about developing and implementing sustainability strategies. This cross tabulation was based on responses from 42 elected officials and 66 staff.

The first comparison was made on the question regarding the top three priority actions to include in a sustainability strategy. As shown in Figure 18, for elected officials, the obvious first priority was *protecting drinking water supplies,* followed in order by *supporting locally owned small businesses,* and then *supporting volunteerism and community spirit* tied with *pursuing economic diversification.* For staff (Figure 19), the top three were in order: *pursuing economic diversification, protecting drinking water supplies,* and *supporting higher density development suitable for a small town.*

Figure 18. Top Three Priority Actions - Elected Officials

Figure 19. Top Three Priority Actions - Staff
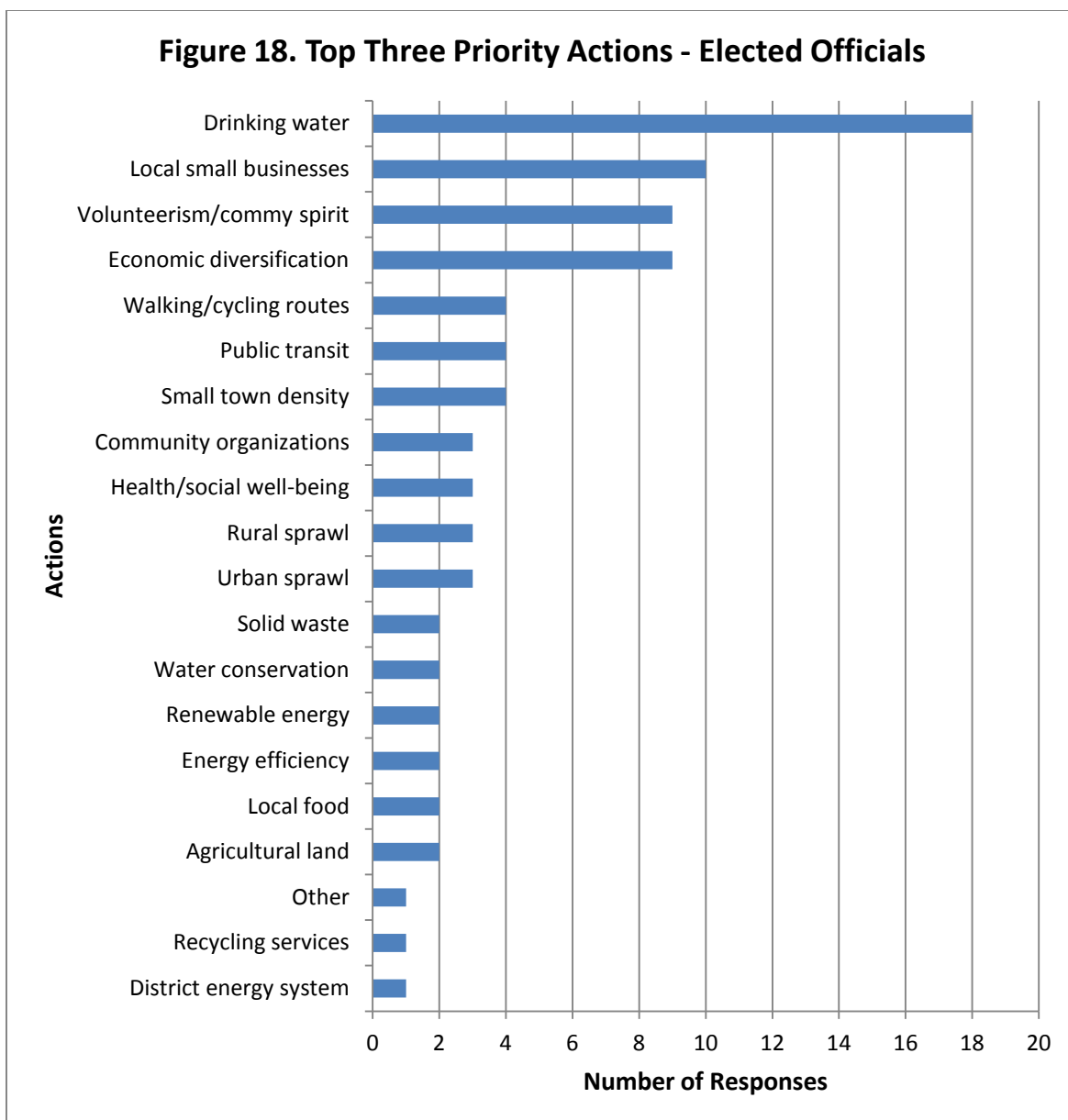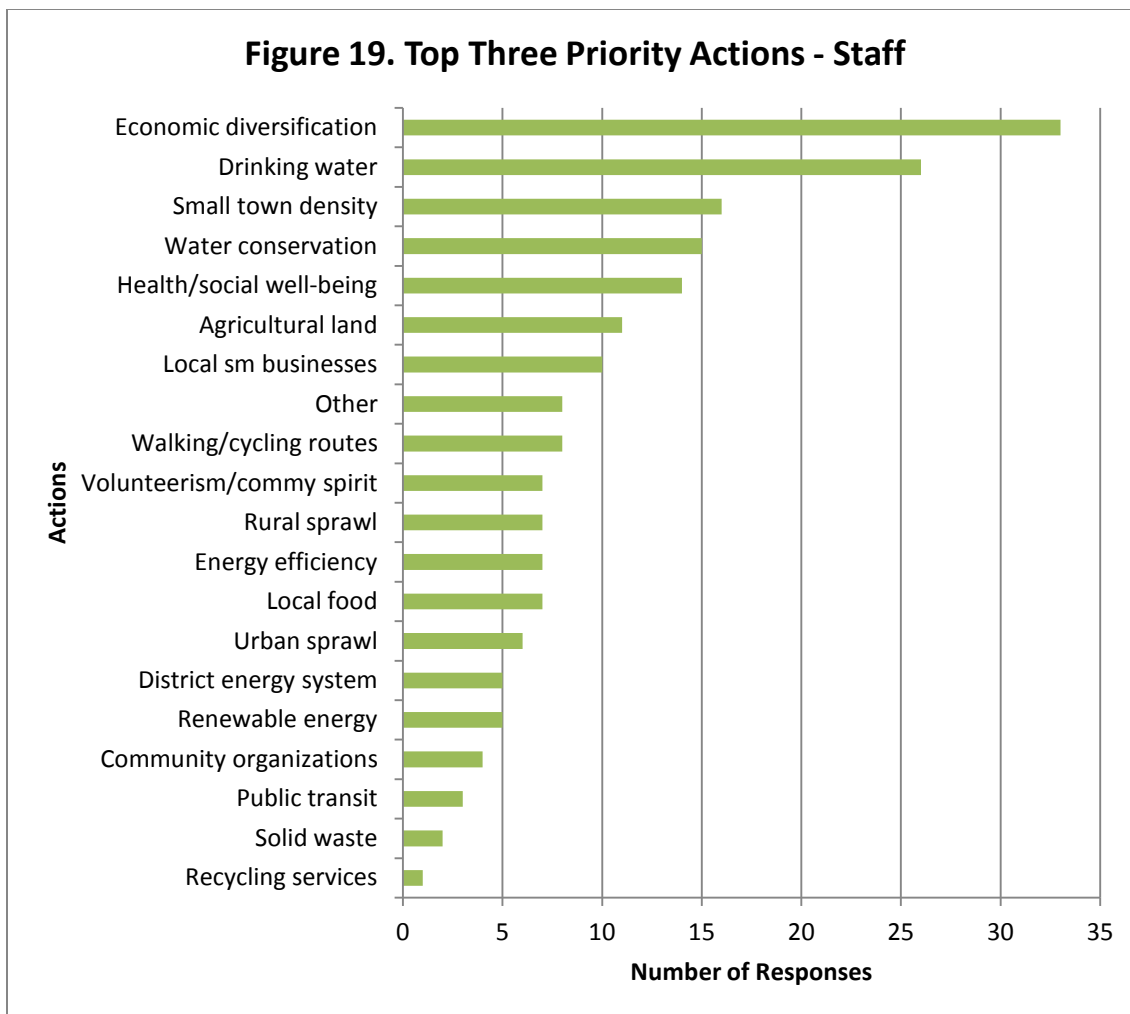
The next comparison was done on the question as to how realistic is it, that the various actions would be implemented. As shown in Figure 20, elected officials indicated that for a good many of the possible actions, it is *very realistic* and *realistic* that they would be implemented. The actions selected most frequently as being *very realistic* for implementation were in order: *protecting drinking water supplies, supporting community organizations,* and *developing walking and/or cycling routes* tied with *supporting volunteerism and community spirit.*

Conversely, several actions were cited by elected officials as being *less realistic* and *not realistic* for implementation. These actions were in order (both ratings combined*): protecting agricultural land* tied with *developing a district or community energy system,* followed by *preventing rural sprawl.*

Figure 20. Level of Realism for Implementing Actions - Elected Officials
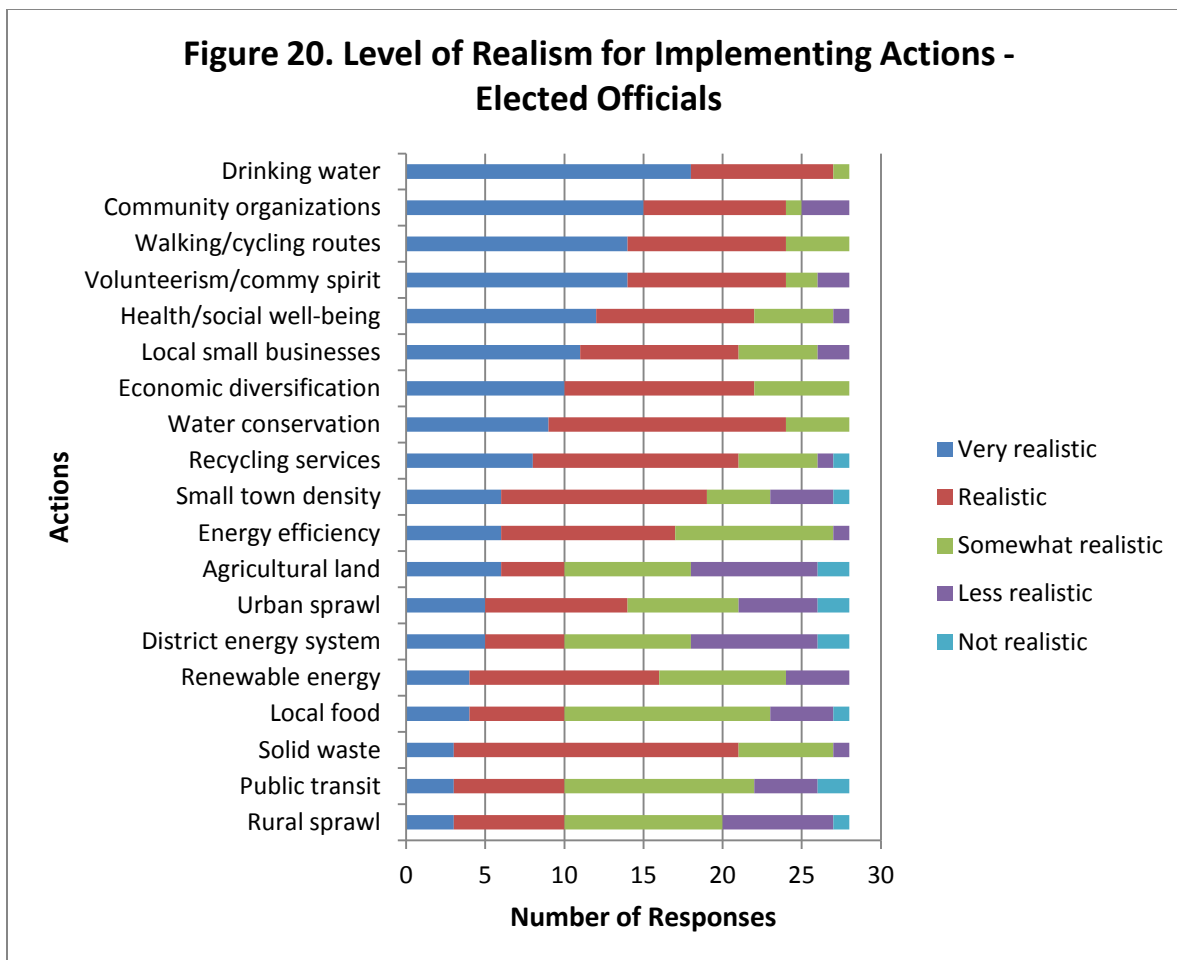
Staff also indicated that it is *very realistic* and *realistic* that a good many of the actions would be implemented (Figure 21). The actions most frequently chosen as being very realistic for implementation were *protecting drinking water supplies* and *supporting volunteerism and community spirit*. Closely behind, three actions were tied as the next most frequently selected: *developing walking and cycling routes, promoting water conservation,* and *pursuing economic diversification.*

Staff cited a number of actions as being *less realistic* and *not realistic* for being implemented. The actions chosen most frequently with these two ratings combined were in order: *developing a community or district energy system, protecting agricultural land,* and *preventing rural sprawl.* Notably, staff rated several actions proportionately more frequently than the elected officials, as being *not realistic* that the actions would be implemented. These were in order: *preventing urban sprawl,* and *developing a district or community energy system* tied with *protecting agricultural land.* For example, 17% of staff rated *protecting agricultural land* as being *not realistic*, compared to only 5% of elected officials.

Figure 21. Level of Realism for Implementing Actions - Staff
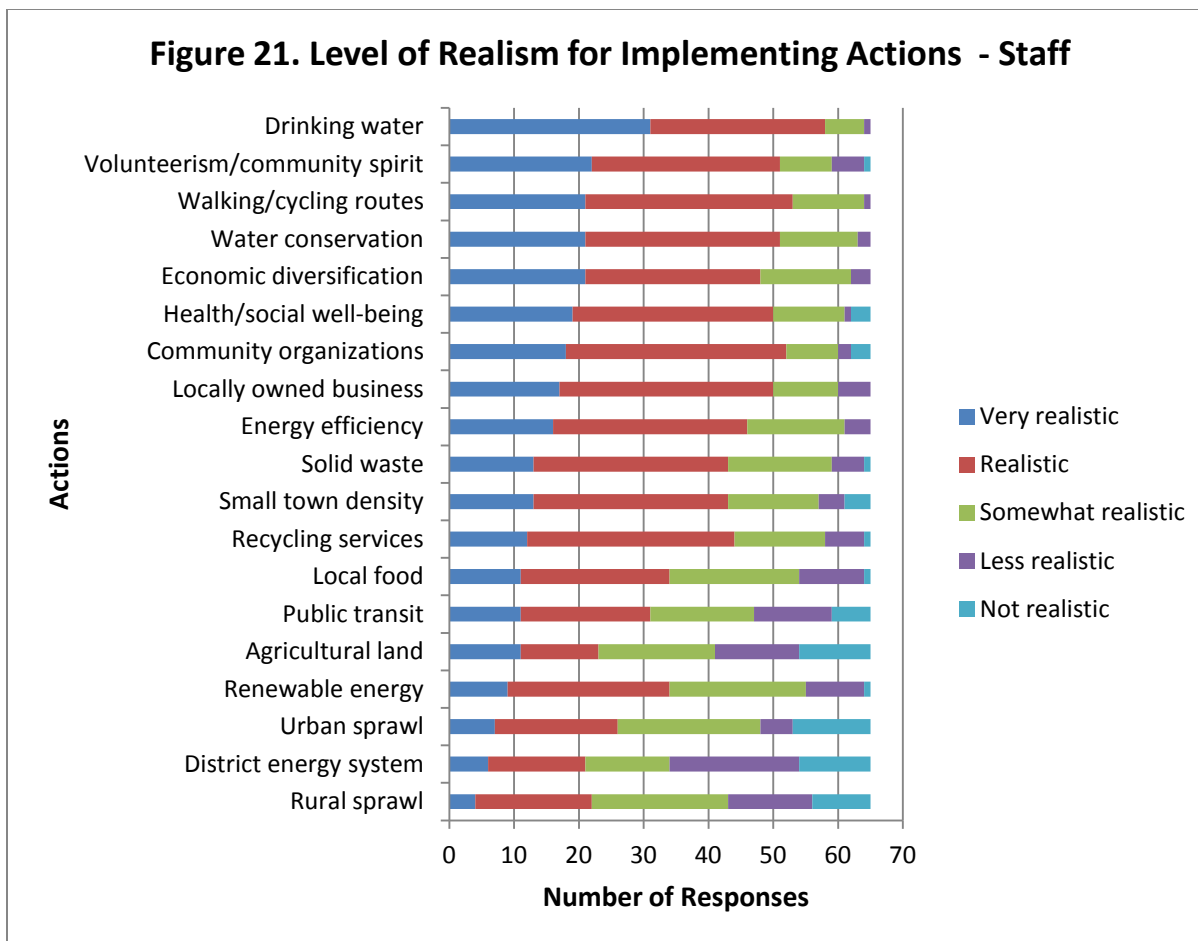
A third comparison between elected officials and staff concerned the factors involved in choosing actions for a rural strategy. Elected officials rated most of the factors as being *very important* and *important* (Figure 22). The factors rated most frequently as being very important were in order: *support from elected officials and community leaders,* and *access to funding* tied with *implementation costs.*

The factors most frequently viewed by elected officials as being *less important* and *not important* were *proximity to urban areas, contribution to provincial sustainability goals*, and *helps urban areas in my regional district and/or the province.*

Figure 22. Level of Importance of Factors in Choosing Actions - Elected Officials
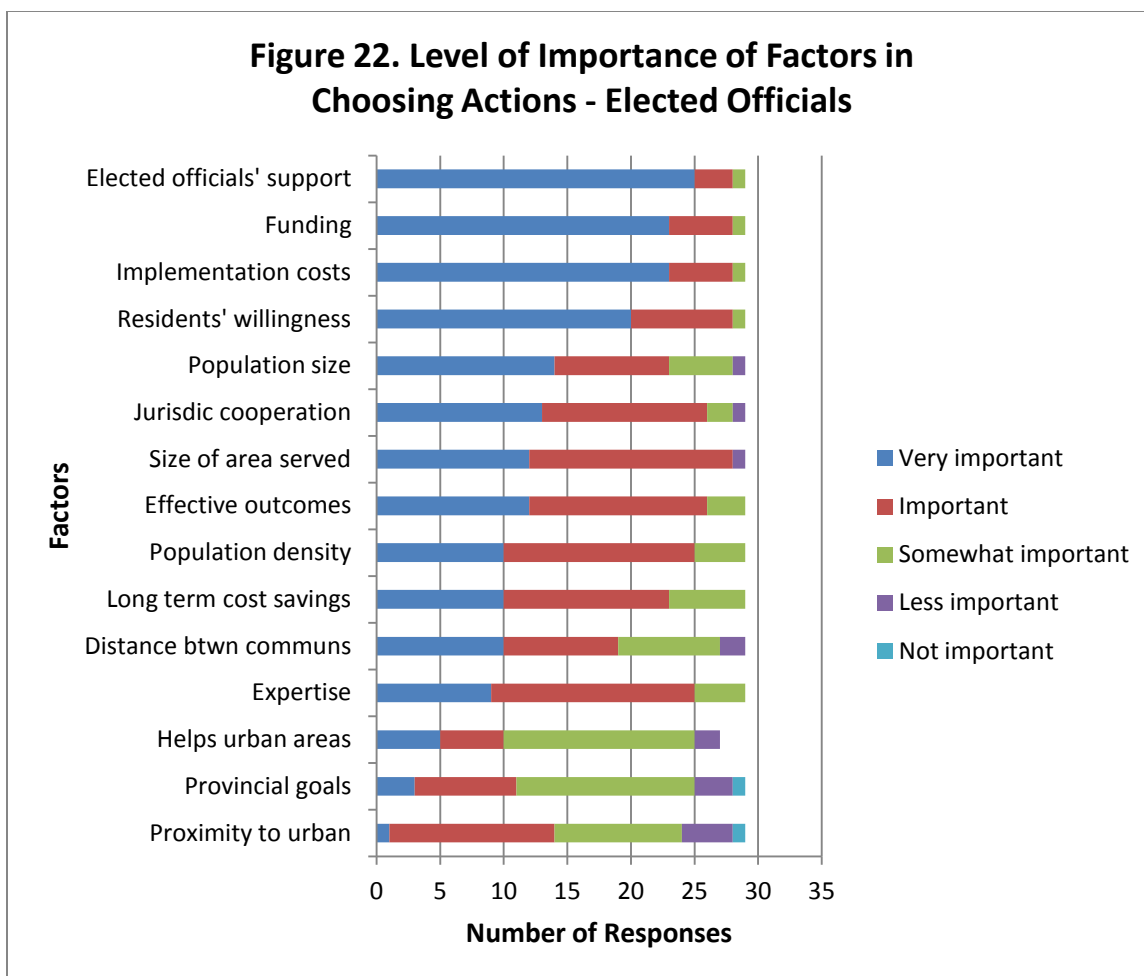
Similar to the elected officials, staff rated most of the factors as being *very important* and *important* in choosing actions for a rural strategy (Figure 23). The factors most often indicated by staff as being *very important* were in order: *access to funding, support from elected officials and community leaders,* and *implementation costs.*

Factors rated most often by staff as being *less important* and *not important* were in order: *helps urban areas in my regional district and/or the province, proximity to urban areas,* and *contribution to provincial sustainability goals.* As above, proportionately more staff than elected officials rated these factors as being *less important* and *not important.* For example, about 29% of staff compared to 17% of elected officials gave these ratings to the factor *proximity to urban areas.*

Figure 23. Level of Importance of Factors in Choosing Actions - Staff
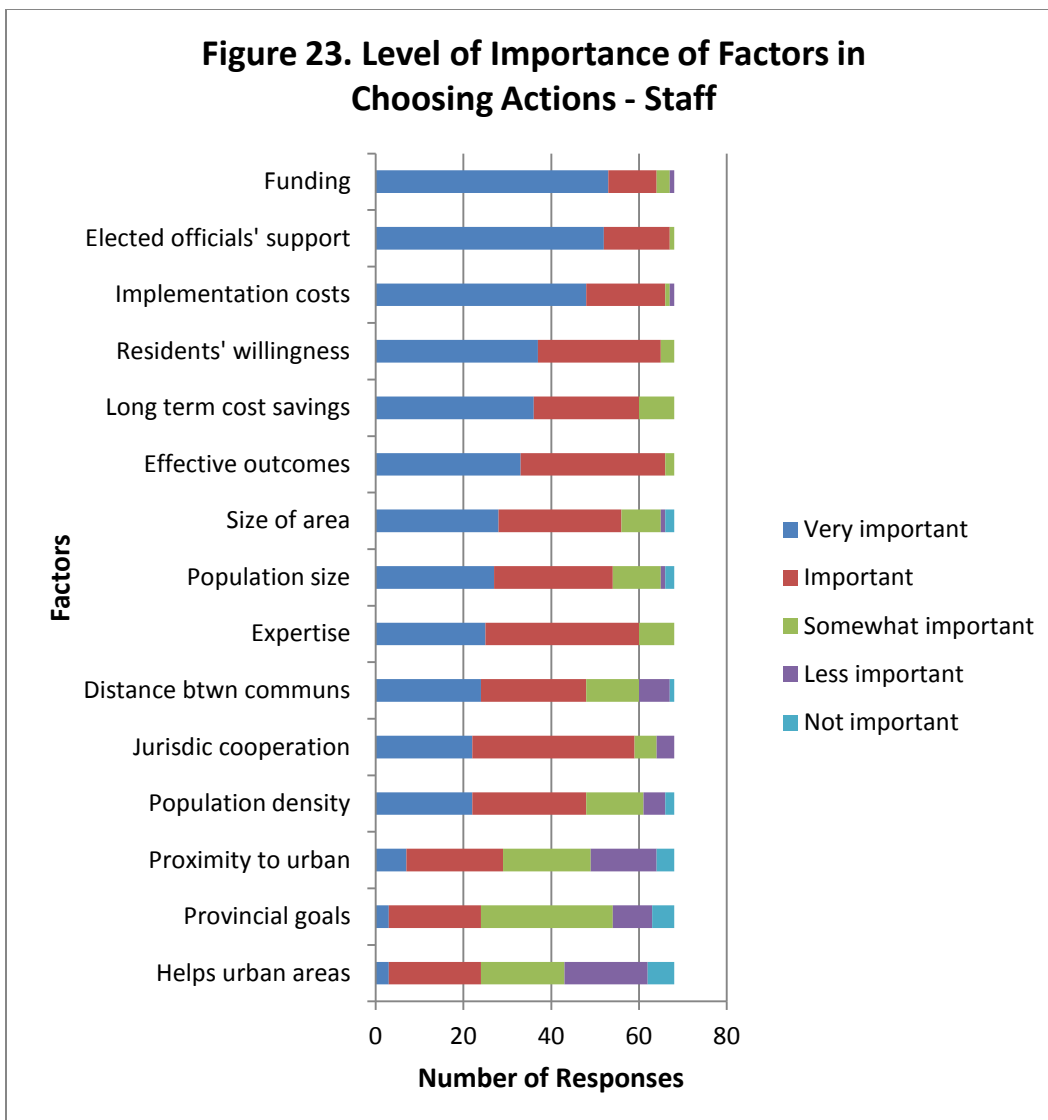
3.2 Experts Survey

A second online survey was conducted for academics, practitioners, and consultants who have been involved with sustainability planning processes for rural areas and small municipalities. There were 22 respondents of which 15 contained valid responses[8]. Of the 15, there were slightly more consultants than academics. Among the group, about two-thirds had conducted this type of work in the Vancouver Island-BC Coast and Kootenay regions. As well, two-thirds had been directly involved in an ICSP or similar process.

The group was asked to rate various factors for their importance to a successful process (Figure 24). *Commitment to implementation* was rated by all respondents (100%) as being *very important*, followed by *support from elected officials and community leaders* tied with *human resources*; both rated as *very important* by 87% of the respondents. All the factors were predominantly rated as being *very important* and *important*.

Figure 24. Level of Importance of Factors for Successful ICSP Process - Experts

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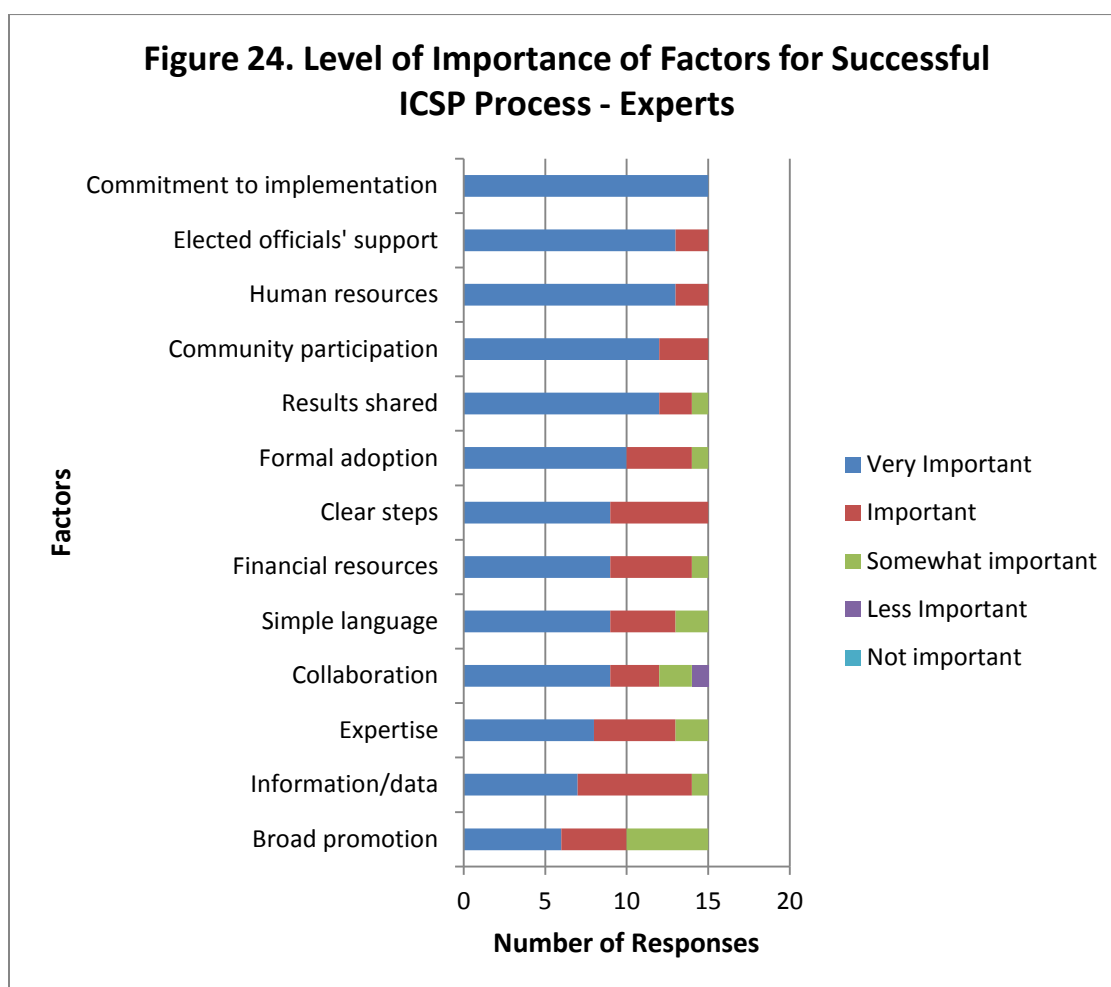
[8] Seven respondents were invalid because they did not meet the criteria of being an academic, consultant and/or practitioner; or they started but did not complete the entire survey.

The next question asked respondents as to what measures or indicators they would use to determine if an ICSP or similar process had been a success for a rural area or small municipality. The answers were evenly distributed across four themes:

o   becomes part of regular decision making and staff functions
o   strategies or actions are implemented
o   level of community participation, and
o   targets and trends in particular indicators (for example housing, solid waste, greenhouse gas emissions).

They were then asked to identify what kinds of changes they would anticipate seeing in a rural area or small municipality, which would indicate that a process had been successful. Responses included:

o   change in community values, community engagement and support
o   implementation is occurring, particularly integration with other policies
o   sustainability thinking is institutionalized into practice, and
o   changes in specific indicators (for example economic resilience, agricultural land, food).

Participants were asked about the suitability of the seven ICSP principles for rural areas and small municipalities. The most frequent responses were *very suitable* and/or *suitable* for all seven principles. Just slightly more than half the respondents (53%) indicated that yes, there are additional principles which are better suited for rural settings, compared to urban settings: consultation with First Nations and integrating nature into human systems. Most of the other replies centred on the application of the ICSP principles:

o   the principles must be adapted to the unique rural circumstances (for example economic diversification rather than urban-type densification)
o   training and capacity building to ensure implementation of sustainability strategies, and
o   how the principles relate to the Local Government Act and Official Community Plans.

Participants were then asked if the definition of sustainability for rural areas and small municipalities is different than that for urban areas and large cities. Almost two-thirds (60%) of the respondents replied *no*. One third replied *yes*. However their text responses indicated the opposite: that the broad definition is the same, although it should be adapted by local residents to fit the unique rural circumstances.

The next set of questions dealt with Regional Growth Strategies (RGS). Eight of the 15 respondents had participated in the preparation of an RGS. Approximately one-third (37.5%) indicated that the objectives required by the Local Government Act for an RGS reflected the ICSP principles *well*; while 25% indicated *somewhat* and 25% indicated *less well*. Similarly, 37.5% of the participants indicated that an RGS process was *somewhat suitable* for conducting sustainability planning for rural areas, with another 37.5% indicating *less suitable*.

The last set of questions focused on actions for and implementation of sustainability strategies. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of various actions to include in a sustainability strategy for a rural setting. As shown in Figure 25, almost all the actions were rated as *very important* and/or *important*. The three actions most frequently rated as *very important* were: *protecting drinking water supplies, supporting food security and local producers,* and *promoting water conservation*; followed by *encouraging health and social well-being, protecting agricultural land* and *reducing solid waste.*

Figure 25. Level of Importance of Actions for a Rural Sustainability Strategy - Experts
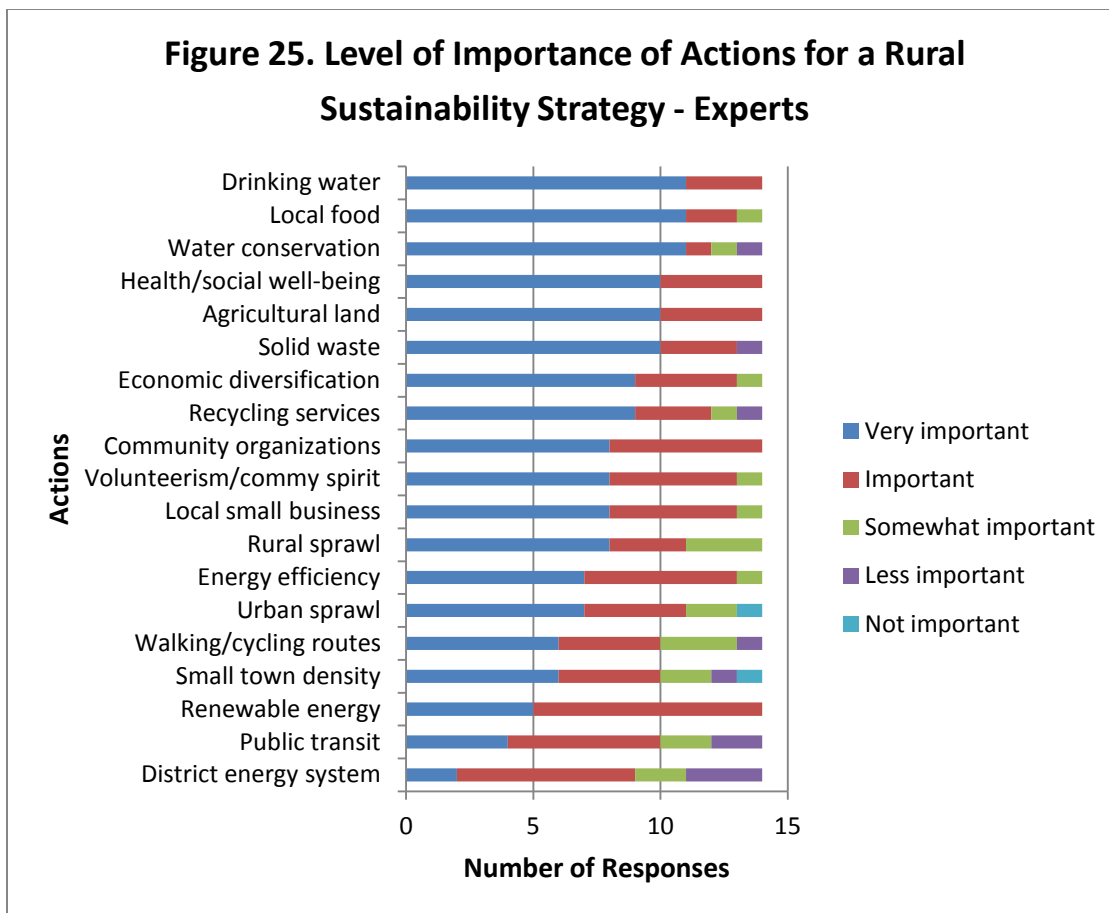
Actions rated as being *less important* and/or *not important* were *developing a district or community energy system* and *providing public transit.* Under 'other', participants added heritage and culture; and commented on the importance of each community's priorities, and acting collaboratively with adjacent small towns and surrounding regional district electoral areas.

The next question asked respondents to rate how realistic it is that the actions would be implemented (Figure 26). Many of the actions were rated as being *very realistic* and *realistic.* The two actions rated most frequently as being *very realistic* for implementation were (in order) *protecting drinking water supplies* and *protecting agricultural land.* In contrast, the actions rated most frequently as being less realistic and not realistic were *providing public transit*, and *developing a district or community energy system*.

Figure 26. Level of Realism for Implementing Actions - Experts
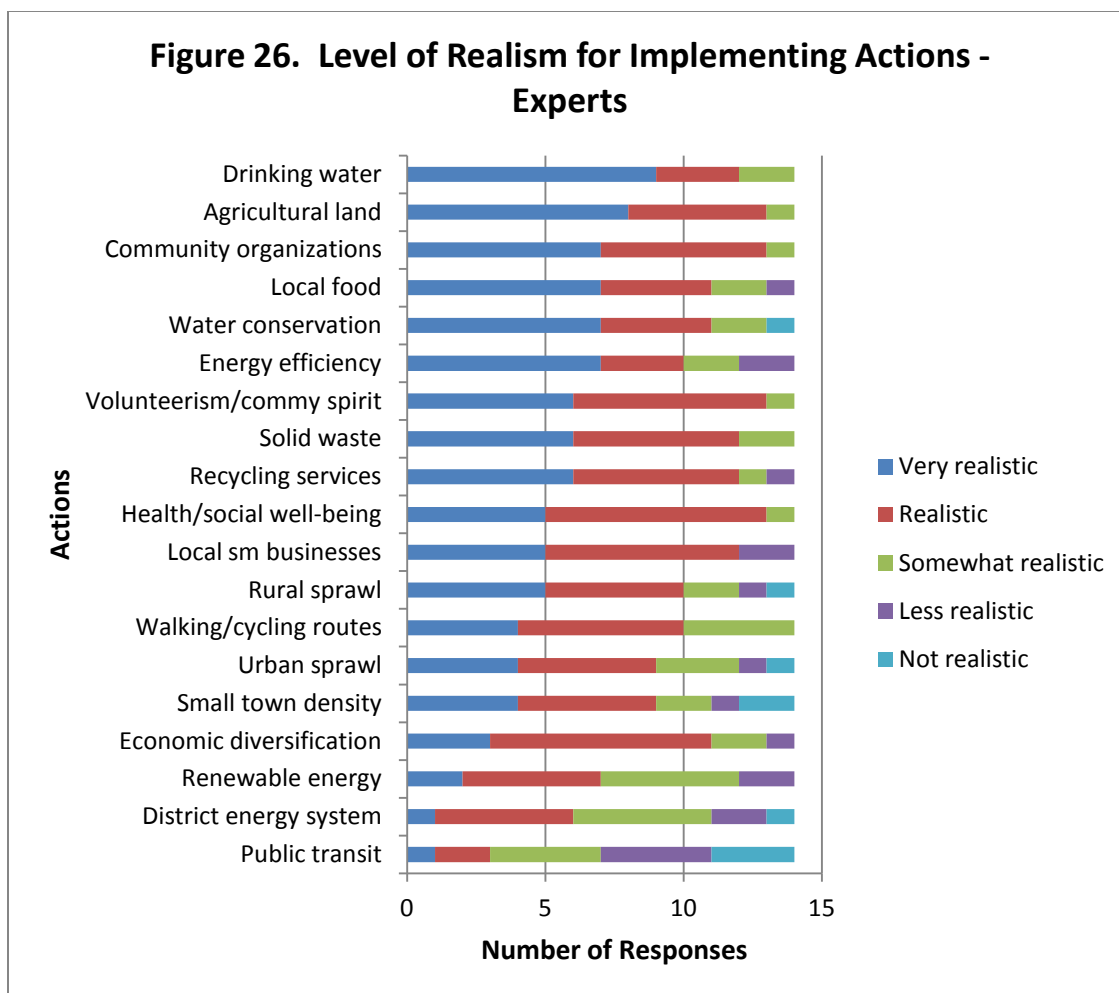
The last question asked respondents to rate the importance of various factors in choosing sustainability actions appropriate for rural areas and/or small municipalities (Figure 27). A good many of the factors were rated as being *extremely important* or *important.* The factor rated almost unanimously (93%) as being *extremely important* was *support from elected officials and community leaders*, followed by *willingness of residents* tied with *effective outcomes (will make a difference).* At the opposite end, the factors rated most often as being *less important* and *not important* were *proximity to urban areas* and *contributes to urban areas in regional district and/or the province.*

Figure 27. Level of Importance of Factors in Choosing Actions - Experts
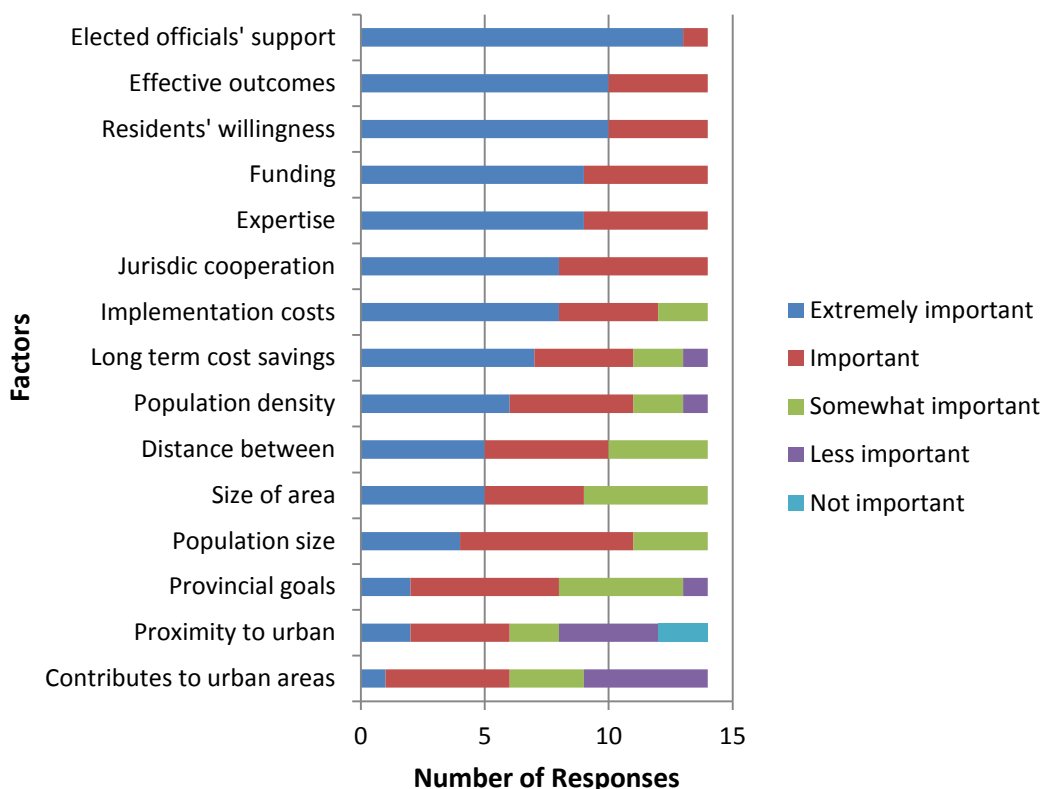
3.3 Focus Groups

A total of 34 individuals from local governments participated in six focus group sessions. The representation was evenly distributed with 17 elected officials and 17 staff; among them 18 were from a municipality and 16 from a regional district. (Two additional participants were staff from non-profit organizations that work with local government.)

The session facilitators led the participants through six questions (see Appendix 3). The questions were similar to those used in the online survey. The following discussion reflects the collated input from all six sessions, with common themes and major conclusions highlighted across all focus groups.

Question 1 asked at what stage was their respective ICSP process. Five had completed their process; eight were underway; and four were not yet started. Three indicated that they had conducted a similar process to an ICSP. (The number of total participants does not necessarily match the number of total processes, as sometimes participants were from the same local government.)

Question 2 asked whether the definition of sustainability for rural areas is different than that for urban areas. The answer was strongly consistent across all six groups. Essentially the basic definition, principles and/or goals of sustainability are the same in theory regardless of being in a rural or urban setting. The crucial differences are:
o   the specific challenges and issues faced
o   the application of sustainability concepts
o   implementation and best practices, and
o   the benchmarks and indicators used.

The next two questions - # 3 and # 4 - were similar. The intent of asking both was to identify what makes a successful planning process for rural areas. Question 3 used the Appreciative Enquiry approach in asking participants to describe the best ICS or similar planning process for a rural area that they had experienced, and then what characteristics made it the best. Four main themes emerged:
o   <u>Public engagement</u> or participation was fun and allowed the community a sense of ownership of the plan. It provided opportunities for discussion as well as using surveys and polls.
o   The particular <u>method or approach</u> included all the 'pillars' of sustainability. It looked at the 'big picture', developed a future vision, and provided learning opportunities. From a practical viewpoint, it was efficient and had sufficient resources; and it did not create impossible barriers such as requiring consensus.
o   Strong <u>community support</u> was important from local government, residents and business.
o   <u>Collaboration</u> was evident, working with adjacent First Nations and local governments, provincial government agencies, and the community. It was innovative and cooperative.

Question 4 asked how would you determine what constitutes a successful process. Participants often framed their input in in terms of what would happen or what you would see as a result of a good process. As with the above question, a number of broad themes emerged:
o   <u>Public engagement</u> would use creative techniques, and have a high proportion and good cross-section of residents (across age groups and interests). It would identify why

> people choose to live where they do. It would foster ownership of the process and the plan, and be 'grass-roots' in approach.

- o <u>Specific trends and/or topics</u> would be addressed in the process; such as attracting more residents (especially young families) and businesses; reduced consumption of water, energy, vehicle use, and solid waste; better air and water quality; a vibrant culture; and more food grown locally.
- o <u>Implementation</u> would be pursued by having long term commitment and a plan that is achievable. Things would get done and the public would be involved with the 'doing'. There would be a timeline and short term targets.
- o A variety of <u>other characteristics</u> would make for a successful process. The ICSP would be an integrated planning tool by including existing plans and policies, and would build upon previous work. It would be based on information and data such as demographics, and would identify the issues. There would be collaboration with all orders of government, and expertise to help.

Question 5 asked how sustainability strategies for rural areas are different than those for urban areas. A number of participants acknowledged that at the broad level, the strategies for either rural or urban must consider the same sustainability 'pillars' – ie. social, environmental, economic, cultural. One person summarized this point by noting that all ways of living must be simultaneously ecologically sustainable and economically profitable. However, there was broad agreement across the focus groups that the specific content of a strategy and how the desired end-state is achieved, would be quite different in rural settings compared to urban, in the following ways:

- o <u>Values</u> – Rural residents have a strong attachment to the places in which they live. The strategies would reflect the values and the reasons why people continue to live in a rural place. Focusing on these underlying values and reasons would help ensure that these elements are continued or sustained.
- o <u>Lifestyle</u> – There is easy access to outdoor recreation like fishing and hunting. Schools and community halls are crucial for educational, cultural and community activities for all residents, not just children and youth.
- o <u>Content specific</u> – Strategies would deal with issues important to rural communities, such as: a viable, resilient economy; essential core services especially health care (clinic or hospital, doctors) and education, high-speed internet; agriculture; forests. An energy strategy for space heating would include a wood stove exchange program rather than a district energy system. A land use and development strategy would address land parcel size and density of development, and particularly the question, what is the appropriate parcel size in rural areas. Another part of a strategy would deal with maintaining services in face of a declining tax base.
- o <u>Implementation</u> - Implementation would happen as small incremental changes and achievements. It would be flexible or nimble, as well as practical or 'down to earth'. It does not have to entail big projects to make a big difference. A change in provincial policy and/or legislation is needed to involve local government in managing forests and agricultural land.

The last question – Question 6 – focused on actions for and implementation of a sustainability strategy, mirroring the online survey. It consisted of a main question and then several follow-up questions. The main question asked participants what three actions they would include in a strategy to move their rural area or small municipality to being more sustainable. The follow-up questions were:
- o how/why did they choose the three

o   how realistic is it that they will be implemented, and
o   what is needed to ensure implementation.
The feedback below is organized according to the questions.

In answering the main question, there was broad agreement on the actions for a rural strategy. In the following list, the first four items were most often identified – especially health care and education. As one participant observed, two of the most important things to rural communities are health and education, neither of which are within local government's jurisdiction. The subsequent topic areas are listed in roughly descending order of frequency:
   o   Health care – recruiting doctors, maintaining clinics and emergency services like ambulances
   o   Education – keeping local schools open; ensuring ongoing community use
   o   Transportation – both within and between communities, and to larger centres; includes walking and bicycling trails
   o   Economic development – pursue diversification, value-added, innovation; business attraction and retention
   o   Infrastructure – provide high speed internet, cel phone service; identify energy sources and energy self-sufficiency; energy efficiency; water use/metering
   o   Agriculture – encourage local food production and sale; agriculture plans; amount of water used for irrigation
   o   Natural environment – preserve natural amenities including riparian areas, forests, water/lakes/rivers; provide hiking, cross country skiing and mountain biking trails
   o   Land use and development – prevent rural sprawl through parcel size and less rural subdivision; keep rural areas rural and urban areas urban; and
   o   Social – support housing for seniors that is age-friendly and affordable; encourage quality of life; grow community, sense of community, vibrancy.

Moving to the first of the follow-up questions, not all groups responded directly to the question as to how or why they chose their particular three actions; the answer being provided more generally as part of the overall discussion. Broadly speaking, the particular actions and topics were selected because: residents had raised the concern or were very keen on the particular matter; the local government was responding to a pressing need; or it was due to information and awareness.

For the remaining two follow-up questions about implementation, participants tended to merge these two. How realistic it is that an action would be implemented is difficult to separate from what is needed to ensure implementation. The feedback tended to focus on the latter - elements needed to ensure implementation – along with observations on decision making and inter-jurisdictional matters.

The elements needed to ensure implementation are:
o   Community support – ongoing communication and involvement, discussion, opportunities to have a role in the 'doing', honour what residents are passionate about (for example local food); community based solutions
o   Realistic goals – items that are do-able; starting small with the 'low hanging fruit' and gaining momentum to address larger items; appropriate scale
o   Leaders and leadership – elected officials, community champions (unelected)
o   Collaboration – among local governments as a sub-region or region; pooling resources, knowledge and capacity; building trust; being inclusive; also with First Nations
o   Partnerships – with other jurisdictions and orders of government, community groups, industry

- o Resources – staff, equipment, funding
- o Mechanism for implementation – a tool for monitoring by staff; regular reporting to the Council or Board and to the community, and
- o Integration – of actions, plans and policies within local government.

Participants also raised the importance of decision-making and jurisdictions, as local governments strive to make their communities more sustainable. A major theme was control or influence over natural resource development, upon which most rural communities – and the provincial economy – depend. Rural regional districts encompass vast areas of Crown forest land (and private forest land in the Kootenays and on Vancouver Island), and Crown agricultural land, yet have little say in its management. For example, a rural sustainability strategy would ideally include forest carbon sequestration, but that is not possible given the provincial jurisdiction.

As well, the local government participants called for a greater share of the taxes and royalties, currently paid by resource based industries to the provincial government, as a way to improve rural economic sustainability. Some noted that levels of provincial services are based on rural population levels, rather than on the value of the natural resources developed – which occurs in rural areas and staffed by rural residents - to provincial and federal governments.

Also related to jurisdictions, local government raised concern that the provincial and federal governments were backing away from sustainability initiatives. Local government needs more legislative tools to raise revenues to fill the funding gap. A particular example was the ability to implement a fuel tax to support public transit, the same as Metro Vancouver.

4.0   DISCUSSION of MAJOR FINDINGS

This section discusses the major findings of the local government survey and focus groups, and the experts' survey. It describes the similarities and differences between the two surveys regarding the two main research themes: 1) the sustainability planning process for rural areas and 2) the actions for a sustainability strategy for rural areas.

4.1 Sustainability Planning Process

A majority of local government respondents reported that their ICSP process was (or was being) conducted by a combination of staff and outside experts, and that they used (or were using) a process that had been developed by themselves. There was common agreement around a number of factors seen as being *very important* and *important* to having a successful process; for example human and financial resources, and support from elected officials. However there was some variation in the responses as to the most critical success factors, among those who had completed a process, those with a process underway, those not yet started, and the experts.

For those with a completed process, the most highly rated factor was *formal adoption of final document and/or policies,* and then *expertise,* followed closely by *human resources, commitment to implementation, support of elected officials,* and *financial resources.* If they could do it over, the one thing that they would change to make the greatest improvement was *commitment to implementation*.

Those with a process underway rated *financial resources* as the most important, followed closely by *community participation*; and then by *formal adoption of final document and/or policies, support of elected officials,* and *commitment to implementation*. The factor they chose to make the greatest improvement was *financial resources*. For those who had not yet begun a process, the factor that is seen as being the most important to making a decision to proceed or not, was *financial resources*, followed by *usefulness or worthwhile doing* and *human resources*.

In comparison, the experts unanimously rated *commitment to implementation* as *very important*, followed by *support from elected officials and community leaders,* and *human resources*.

As part of the Gas Tax Agreement with the federal government, local governments are required to show that they are applying the seven ICSP elements or principles. There was consensus among all respondents in both surveys that the seven ICSP principles are very suitable for rural areas and small municipalities in the broad sense, and are best suited when adapted to fit the particular circumstances of the rural setting. As well, the broad definition of 'sustainability' applies to rural areas the same as for urban areas; however the details would be different to reflect the rural context.

Both surveys tried to gain a sense as to whether Regional Growth Strategies (RGS) could be a tool to conduct sustainability planning for rural areas or regions, because RGS are prepared and implemented by regional districts. One question asked whether the objectives of an RGS reflect the ICSP principles. The results from both surveys indicated a range in the responses, with the experts most frequently choosing *well* (37.5%), and local government respondents most frequently selecting *not applicable - no RGS (39.4%)* and *I don't know* (23.2%). Both groups were similar in that the responses were spread across the answer categories, and results were thus less definitive compared to other questions (see Section 4.3 for further discussion).

4.2 Sustainability Strategies

One of the main goals of the research was to identify what types of actions are suitable for and would realistically be implemented in rural sustainability strategies. There was strong consistency among all survey participants in rating *protecting drinking water supplies* the most frequently, as being *very important* and *very realistic*. However, there were readily apparent differences in how other actions were seen for being important to include and realistic for implementation.

Local government respondents rated *pursuing economic diversification* as the second most important action, with *encouraging health and well-being* as third. In contrast, the experts rated *supporting food security and local producers* and *promoting water conservation* as highly as *protecting drinking water supplies*.

There were major differences in how the respondents from the two surveys rated actions as *less important* and/or *not important* for a rural sustainability strategy. Local government respondents rated the following actions most frequently (both ratings combined): *developing a district or community energy system*, *protecting agricultural land*, and *preventing urban sprawl*. In comparison, the expert respondents rarely rated any of the possible actions as being *less important* or *not important*. The one similarity was that the experts most frequently rated *developing a district or community energy system* as *less important*.

The research also wanted to explore implementation. The results from both surveys again revealed similarities and differences. The one similarity, all respondents rated *protecting drinking water supplies* the most frequently as *very realistic* for implementation. The two groups then responded quite differently as to what other actions they consider being realistic for implementation.

Local government respondents indicated *supporting volunteerism and community spirit* and *developing walking and/or cycling routes,* the second and third most frequently as being very realistic for implementation. The expert respondents rated *protecting agricultural land* and *supporting community organizations* as their second and third most frequent choice as being *very realistic* for implementation.

The two survey groups also rated differently the actions seen as being problematic for implementation; that is, what is less or not realistic. Local government respondents rated the following actions the most frequently for being *not realistic* (in order): *developing a district or community energy system, preventing urban sprawl, protecting agricultural land, preventing rural sprawl,* and *providing public transit*. The expert respondents rated two actions most frequently for being not realistic: *providing public transit* and *supporting higher density suitable for a small town*.

The final comparison focuses on the factors involved in choosing appropriate actions for a strategy. All respondents from both surveys rated *support from elected officials and community leaders* the most frequently as being *very* or *extremely important*. However their next choices were different.

Local government respondents rated *access to funding* and *implementation costs* the second and third most frequently as being *very important*. The expert respondents rated *effective outcomes (will make a difference)* and *willingness of residents* (tied) as the next most frequently rated as *extremely important*.

Both survey groups agreed on the factors considered less and/or not important in choosing appropriate actions for a rural strategy. Local government respondents selected *helps urban areas in my regional district and/or the province* the most frequently as being *not important*, followed by *proximity to urban areas*. The expert respondents also selected these two but rated them in reverse order. Both survey groups also indicated *contribution to provincial sustainability goals* as being a lesser consideration.

4.3 Issue Specific Findings

Among the results, the research project has revealed several findings that deserve further discussion.

Regional Growth Strategies and ICSP

The first finding concerns Regional Growth Strategies (RGS). As described in earlier sections, the objectives for RGS, as listed in the Local Government Act, are complementary to the ICSP principles affiliated with the Gas Tax Agreement. The Agreement itself refers to RGS in Schedule H. As noted above, the survey responses indicate that there is no broad agreement for or against using RGS as a basis for sustainability planning in rural regions. The results may be due to a lack of awareness about the objectives as listed in the legislation. A secondary consideration is that RGS are only required in certain high growth regions of the province and are optional elsewhere. In fact, about 40% of the local government respondents indicated that their regional district did not have an RGS.

The inconsistent results point to a level of uncertainty in using RGS for rural sustainability planning. Further consideration and discussion would be needed regarding how an RGS process might be adapted to simultaneously serve as a rural ICSP process at the regional scale.

Agricultural Land and Sprawl

The second finding concerns the related issues of agricultural land, rural sprawl and urban sprawl. Agriculture and local food production has been receiving increased public support in recent years, as evidenced by the growing number of community gardens, farmers markets, and 'buy local' campaigns throughout BC. The public support appears to be based on a number of inter-related concerns such as personal health, local economic development, and greenhouse gas emissions from long-distance transportation of food. In areas of high population growth, land use and development are related concerns, where urban and/or rural sprawl may impinge upon agricultural land. These concerns are frequently included in sustainability planning processes and the resulting strategies; and thus were included in the survey questions for this research project.

Although many respondents did indicate that protecting agricultural land, and preventing rural and urban sprawl were important actions for a rural strategy, a good many other respondents indicated that these actions were of somewhat, less or no importance as part of a rural strategy. Similarly a good portion of respondents indicated that implementing these measures is somewhat, less or not realistic. These results are unexpected, coming from rural local governments; and given the growing public support for agriculture, local food and farmers markets (Connell 2006), along with the Agricultural Land Commission's recent review and strategic direction (ALC 2010). As well, by comparison, the ratings - somewhat, less or not important, and somewhat, less or not realistic – were only indicated for two other actions - *developing a district or community energy system* and *providing public transit*. These two

actions usually require population densities and/or special funding arrangements to support, and thus the low ratings are logical coming from rural local governments.

Separating the municipal respondents from the regional district respondents gives a slightly different picture. Those with regional districts gave agricultural land higher importance as part of a strategy; a high proportion chose it as one of the top three priority actions; and gave it higher ratings for being realistically implemented. These results make sense given that most agricultural land is found in the unincorporated areas of regional districts, outside of municipal boundaries. However, a good proportion of respondents from regional districts also indicated that preventing urban and/or rural sprawl was somewhat, less and/or not realistic for implementation.

There was one notable difference between elected officials and staff. Staff rated *protecting agricultural land* proportionately more often as a top priority action (sixth on their list), than did elected officials (17th on their list). However, both groups were somewhat similar in their view that implementing actions to protect agricultural land, and prevent urban and rural sprawl was less or not realistic as part of a sustainability strategy.

The results call for further exploration as to potential underlying reasons and possible solutions, such as:
o   the use of the word 'preventing' in reference to sprawl, as opposed to other wording such as 'managing' or 'reducing', in the questionnaire
o   overlapping jurisdictions and working relationships between local governments and the BC Agricultural Land Commission
o   the need for regional data on actual costs of sprawl and the benefits of agricultural land, in monetary and other measures, for both the near and long term throughout BC
o   the level of awareness among local governments as to residents' preferences, and
o   relationships among local government, residents, the agricultural sector and the development sector, and opportunities to further mutual understanding.

In regards to the third point above, there is research on the costs of sprawl, some of it from BC, as well as elsewhere in Canada and the United States. Buchan differentiates between urban, suburban and rural sprawl, citing rural sprawl as the most costly (Plan Canada 2004; p38 & ff). The costs include road infrastructure (construction and maintenance), loss of natural forest, and storm water pollution. More recently, Fox compiled data from BC, Canada and the United States on costs associated with rural sprawl from greenhouse gas emissions and for infrastructure such as roads, wastewater and solid waste (Fox; unpublished draft 2010).

To summarize, it appears that rural local governments across BC are aware of how they would approach sustainability planning, and the types of actions that they could include and implement as part of their strategies. However, further work and discussion is needed to address the specific findings regarding agricultural land, and urban and rural sprawl, if BC's rural communities and areas are to become sustainable.

5.0   RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper's introductory chapter posed three outcomes anticipated as a result of the research:
- o the elements needed for a successful ICSP process in rural areas
- o the actions for a rural sustainability strategy, and
- o an improved understanding of the role that rural areas have in the sustainability of urban areas and related provincial goals.

The recommendations that follow are based on the collective input from the research participants, and reflect their knowledge and experience in rural BC.

5.1 A Rural ICSP Process

A successful ICSP process for rural BC will use the following tools:
- o technical leadership from a combination of in-house staff and outside experts
- o an appropriate planning process developed by the local government and residents
- o the seven ICSP principles, adapted in ways meaningful to their rural situation
- o a budget securing the financial and human resources
- o demonstrated support from elected officials and community leaders
- o formal adoption of the final document and/or policies by the Council or Board
- o a demonstrated commitment to implementation
- o a community participation strategy with fun, creative and varied approaches, and
- o research to identify residents' values and the reasons they choose to live a rural lifestyle and in the places they do.

5.2 Rural Sustainability Strategies

A rural sustainability strategy would likely include the following primary actions:
- o protect drinking water supplies
- o pursue economic diversification
- o encourage health and social well-being, and
- o support locally-owned small businesses;

as well as these secondary actions:
- o develop walking and/or bicycling routes
- o promote water conservation
- o support volunteerism and community spirit
- o support community organizations.

Choosing the most appropriate actions for a rural sustainability strategy will be primarily based on:
- o support from elected officials and community leaders
- o access to funding, and
- o costs of implementation.

Perhaps the most critical ingredient to success was best stated by one focus group participant: 'The plan has to be believable and the public has to believe that it can be accomplished'.

5.3 Rural and Urban

One of the research goals was to gain a sense of the role that rural areas have in the sustainability of BC's urban areas and in achieving provincial goals related to sustainability such as GHG reductions and energy efficiency. The survey results clearly indicate that local governments in rural BC are mainly concerned about their rural areas and small municipalities. Helping urban areas, even those within their region, and/or helping to achieve provincial goals related to sustainability do not appear to be primary motivating factors in developing the rural strategies.

During the focus groups, participants often acknowledged their regional urban centres as being important for things such as specialized health care, shopping and services. In contrast, urban areas rely on rural areas and rural residents for many things; for example, hydroelectricity, oil, natural gas, food, timber, minerals, water, and outdoor recreation; as does BC's economy (see Sec 5.4).

Other differences between rural and urban areas concern the types of actions for sustainability strategies. As this survey found, rural local government respondents identified drinking water and economic diversification as being the most important components for a strategy. In contrast, a casual review of many cities' plans and policies shows that urban local governments commonly include public transit, affordable housing, and high density mixed use development as main elements in a sustainability strategy for a city.

5.4 Provincial Policy and Legislation

As noted in previous sections, local government participants identified decision-making and jurisdictions, as significant factors in their ability to make their communities more sustainable. Three major areas were identified:
- o natural resource development
- o health care, and
- o education.

All of these are important to rural communities' well-being; none of them are within local government's jurisdiction. A major theme was a call for greater control or influence, particularly over natural resource development. The residents of rural communities work in the resource based industries, upon which BC's rural and provincial economies depend. These industries generate local employment and government revenue, which in turn support health care and education for all BC residents – both rural and urban.

The contribution of rural areas to BC's economy compared to that of metropolitan areas has been well documented (Baxter and Ramlo, 2002; p.3):

> Such analysis indicates that, in reality, metropolitan regions in British Columbia make a below average per capita contribution, and hence are dependent on international export revenue from commodities originating in non-metropolitan regions of the province. Over the past decade, out of the total provincial annual average of $33.8 billion in international exports, $24.0 billion (71%) originated in non-metropolitan areas and $9.8 billion (29%) originated in metropolitan areas. … Of the average annual international export of goods of $26.7 billion, $21.3 billion (80%) originated in non-metropolitan regions and $5.5 billion (20%) originated in metropolitan regions.

A second report also confirms the importance of BC's rural areas (Baxter, Berlin and Ramlo, 2005; p.4):

In this report, the province is divided into ten economic regions in order to estimate the contribution of each of these regions to the province's economic base. The goal of this approach is to identify the spatial nature of the province's economy, not to suggest that one region is more important, or more deserving, than another. The findings of this research clearly show that all of us in British Columbia are resource dependent, and that the way in which we sustain the economy, and the communities, of our resource regions will affect all of our futures. As they say in Alert Bay: wi'lu'moa (we will all travel together).

As noted in one focus group, levels of provincial services are generally based upon rural population levels, rather than on the value to provincial and federal governments of the natural resources developed – which occurs in rural areas and staffed by rural residents. Some participants called for a greater share of the taxes and royalties, currently paid by resource based industries to the provincial government, as a way to improve rural economic sustainability.

Also related to jurisdictions, local government participants raised concern that the provincial and federal governments were backing away from sustainability initiatives. Survey respondents identified funding and implementation costs as primary factors in choosing actions for their sustainability strategies. This kind of support from other orders of government is needed to enable ongoing implementation at the local level.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, during the past five to ten years, a number of rural local governments in BC have embarked upon a sustainability approach to their planning efforts, whether through their own initiative or through an ICSP process. There are a number of information sources that contain these 'good news' stories about community sustainability planning and related work being conducted in the province, such as the following:

- o **Smart Planning for Communities** - digital examples library
  http://smartplanningbc.ca/spctools.html#planning
- o **BC Rural Network** - Resource library for BC's rural communities
  http://bcruralnetwork.ca/page/resources
- o **BC Climate Action Toolkit** - Success Stories, Climate Action Lists & Examples map
  http://www.toolkit.bc.ca/success-stories .

In this research project, rural local governments across BC have shared their knowledge, experiences and perspectives as to how ICSP processes and strategies can succeed in their areas. Success is built upon adapting broad sustainability concepts and principles, planning processes, and strategies to reflect their communities' and regions' unique rural circumstances; as well as paying attention to the practical details of human and financial resources, and support from elected officials and the community. Ongoing support from other orders of government is needed for planning, for the many local governments who have yet to apply the ICSP principles and/or begin an ICSP process. Support from other orders of government will also be crucial particularly for implementation, along with a collaborative approach to address the jurisdictional issues and concerns raised.

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APPENDIX 1. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Note to reader: The survey was conducted online using Survey Monkey. The layout of the questionnaire was different than what is presented here.

SPC logo
Fraser Basin Council – Smart Planning for Communities
Integrated Community Sustainability Planning and Rural BC

Introduction

The Fraser Basin Council's Smart Planning for Communities Program (SPC) is researching the application of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) by regional districts for rural areas, as well as by small municipalities, throughout British Columbia. The project is funded by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions.

The research focuses on the elements that both contribute to and pose challenges for successful processes, and the type of sustainability strategies that are suitable for rural areas and small towns in BC. Most of the research to date regarding sustainability planning and strategies is based on experiences in cities and metropolitan areas.

Background

For the purposes of this research project, rural is defined as the unincorporated electoral areas within BC's regional districts (excluding Metro Vancouver) and the incorporated municipalities within those regional districts with populations less than 10,000.

This research project uses the same definition of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning as the 2005 federal Gas Tax Agreement (and the affiliated Community Works Fund). ICSP is an approach to local government planning that emphasizes the following principles:
Long-term thinking – being future oriented over many decades
Broad in scope – including economic, environmental, social and cultural elements
Integration – coordinating all types of plans or planning activities
Collaboration – involving other orders of government and community organizations
Public engagement and education – seeking residents' participation
Implementation – putting plans into action
Monitoring and evaluation – setting targets and tracking results

Although highly complementary, ICSP is different than and separate from other initiatives in BC, namely: the Climate Action Charter; requirements that Official Community Plans contain policies, actions and targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and typical Official Community Plans and/or Regional Growth Strategies.

As well, we want to learn about other sustainability planning processes for rural areas and communities in BC, which are similar to but not carried out as an ICSP initiative. We ask those of you in this situation to also complete the survey.

Directions

The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. **Your answers and identity will be kept confidential.** If you are a Regional District Board member, who is from a municipality greater than 10,000, please respond to the survey in your Regional District role. The results of the research will be presented in a final report by July 2012, which will be shared with local governments.

PART ONE: About You and Your Area
[have check boxes for these first two questions]
1) Are you an:

_____Elected official	_____Engineer/public works
_____CAO	_____Sustainability coordinator
_____Planner	_____Other

2) Do you work for and/or represent:
   - A regional district; please name: _____
   - An incorporated municipality; please name: _____

PART TWO: About the Sustainability Planning Process

3) What stage of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) has your local government reached? *[*
- It has **completed** an ICSP process
- It has **started** an ICSP process but has not completed it
- has **not started** an ICSP process
- I don't know.

If the local government **has completed** an ICSP process:

4) Was the majority of the planning process conducted by outside experts, in-house staff, or a combination of both?
   Outside experts / in-house staff / combination of both / don't know

5) Did you develop your own planning process or use an established framework?
   Developed own process / used established framework / don't know

6) How important were each of the following things to your process? Please rate each one.
   [very important/ important/ somewhat important/ less important / not important - scale/words next to each one]
   - Financial resources
   - Human resources (staff, outside experts and/or volunteers)
   - Information and data sources
   - Expertise (staff, outside experts and/or volunteers)
   - Collaboration with orders of government, agencies and/or community organizations
   - Broad promotion
   - Community participation
   - Simple language
   - Support from elected officials and community leaders
   - Clear steps in the process
   - Results shared with community
   - Formal adoption of final document and/or policies
   - Commitment to implementation
   - Other (please identify and rank its importance): _____

7) If you could do it over, which one thing from the list in the above question would have made the greatest improvement to your planning process? *Small box to enter answer or choose from drop-down list*

8) How successful do you feel the process was?
    very successful / successful / somewhat successful / less successful / not successful / undecided

9) To what degree has the ICSP process changed your local government, for example, in daily operations, decision making, and attitudes?
Very significantly / significantly / somewhat significantly / less significantly / no change

If the local government **has started** an ICSP process but has not completed it:

10) Is the majority of the planning process being conducted by outside experts, in-house staff, or a combination of both?
    Outside experts / in-house staff / combination of both / don't know

11) Are you developing your own planning process or using an established framework?
    Developing own process / using established framework / don't know

12) How important are each of the following things to the process? Please rate each one. *[very important/ important/ somewhat important/ less important / not important - scale/words next to each one]*
    - Financial resources
    - Human resources (staff, outside experts and/or volunteers)
    - Information and data sources
    - Expertise (staff, outside experts and/or volunteers)
    - Collaboration with orders of government, agencies and/or community organizations
    - Broad promotion
    - Community participation
    - Simple language
    - Support from elected officials and community leaders
    - Clear steps in the process
    - Results shared with community
    - Formal adoption of final document and/or policies
    - Commitment to implementation
    - Other (please identify and rank its importance): _____

13) If you could adjust something, which one thing from the items listed in the above question would make the greatest improvement to your planning process? *Small box to enter answer or drop-down list.*

If the local government **has not started** an ICSP process:

14) How important is each of the following things in making a decision about whether to proceed or not with an ICSP process? Please rate each one. *[[very important/ important/ somewhat important/ less important / not important - scale/words next to each one]*
    - Financial resources
    - Human resources (staff, outside experts and/or volunteers)

- Information and data sources
- Expertise (staff, outside experts and/or volunteers)
- Collaboration with orders of government, agencies and/or community organizations
- Usefulness or worthwhile doing
- Clear steps in the process
- Formal adoption of final document and/or policies
- Commitment to implementation
- Community Works (ie Gas Tax) Funds already being used to support sustainability
- Other (please identify and rank its importance): _____

15) If your local government is considering proceeding with an ICSP process, how important are the following in making the decision?

   a)   Support from elected officials
   b) Support from residents and community leaders
[extremely important / important / somewhat important less important / not important]

Next questions are for all local governments:

16) The 2005 federal Gas Tax Agreement (and the affiliated Community Works Fund) defines an ICSP process as an approach to local government planning that demonstrates the following seven principles:

- Long-term thinking – being future oriented over many decades
- Broad in scope – including economic, environmental, social and cultural elements
- Integration – coordinating all types of plans or planning activities
- Collaboration – involving other orders of government and community organizations
- Public engagement and education – seeking residents' participation
- Implementation – putting plans into action
- Monitoring and evaluation – setting targets and tracking results

How suitable is each of these principles for rural areas and small communities?
 Very suitable / suitable / somewhat suitable / less suitable / not suitable – next to each principle – have list of principles again but without definitions

17) Are there additional sustainability planning principles which are better suited for rural areas and small communities, compared to urban areas? Please name them and why.
      Yes/No [If yes, have a small box to enter their answer]

18) Does your Regional District have a Regional Growth Strategy? (This question applies to respondents who are with either an incorporated municipality or a regional district.)
      Yes/No/don't know

19) How well do you feel that the Regional Growth Strategy reflects the ICSP principles?
      Very well / well / somewhat / less well/ not well / don't know / not applicable-no RGS

PART THREE: About Sustainability Strategies
These questions are for all local governments.

20) How important are each of the following actions as part of a sustainability strategy for your rural areas and/or community(ies)? Please rate each one.
[extremely important / important / somewhat important / less important / not important - scale/words next to each factor]

- Protecting agricultural land
- Supporting food security and local producers
- Protecting drinking water supplies
- Promoting energy efficiency
- Increasing use of renewable energy
- Developing a district or community energy system
- Promoting water conservation
- Pursuing economic diversification
- Supporting locally owned small businesses
- Reducing solid waste
- Promoting and/or providing recycling services
- Preventing urban sprawl
- Preventing rural sprawl
- Supporting higher density development suitable for a small town
- Providing public transit
- Developing walking and/or cycling routes
- Encouraging health and social well being
- Supporting volunteerism and community spirit
- Supporting community organizations
- Other (please identify and rank its importance): _____

21) From the list in the above question, which three actions are your top priorities?
Have same list with check boxes; must check three.

22) How realistic is it that each the following actions would be implemented, as part of a sustainability strategy for your rural areas and/or community(ies)? Please rate each one.
[very realistic / realistic / somewhat realistic / less realistic / not realistic - scale/words next to each]
- Protecting agricultural land
- Supporting food security and local producers
- Protecting drinking water supplies
- Promoting energy efficiency
- Increasing use of renewable energy
- Developing a district or community energy system
- Promoting water conservation
- Pursuing economic diversification
- Supporting locally owned small businesses
- Reducing solid waste
- Promoting and/or providing recycling services
- Preventing urban sprawl
- Preventing rural sprawl
- Supporting higher density development suitable for a small town
- Providing public transit

- Developing walking and/or cycling routes
- Encouraging health and social well being
- Supporting volunteerism and community spirit
- Supporting community organizations
- Other (please identify and rank): _____

23) How important are the following things in choosing appropriate sustainability actions for rural areas and/or communities? Please rate each one. *[[extremely important / important / somewhat important / less important / not important - scale/words next to each]*
- Size of geographic area served
- Size of the population
- Density of population
- Distances between communities
- Implementation costs
- Long term cost savings
- Willingness of residents
- Support from elected officials and community leaders
- Access to expertise
- Access to funding
- Proximity to urban areas
- Helps urban areas in my regional district and/or the province
- Contribution to provincial sustainability goals
- Effective outcomes - will make a difference
- Jurisdictional cooperation
- Other (please identify and rank its importance): _____

24) If you have additional comments, please use the space below.
[have comment box]

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

JC Sept. 2012

APPENDIX 2. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EXPERTS

Note to reader: The survey was conducted online using Survey Monkey. The layout of the questionnaire was different than what is presented here.

SPC logo
Fraser Basin Council – Smart Planning for Communities
Integrated Community Sustainability Planning and Rural BC

Introduction
The Fraser Basin Council's Smart Planning for Communities Program (SPC) is researching the application of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) by regional districts for rural areas, as well as by small municipalities, throughout British Columbia. The project is funded by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions.

The research focuses on the elements that both contribute to and pose challenges for successful processes, and the type of sustainability strategies that are suitable for rural areas and small towns in BC.

Background
For the purposes of this research project, rural is defined as the unincorporated electoral areas within BC's regional districts (excluding Metro Vancouver) and the incorporated municipalities within those regional districts with populations less than 10,000.

This research project uses the same definition of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning as the 2005 federal Gas Tax Agreement. ICSP is an approach to local government planning that emphasizes the following principles: long-term thinking, broad in scope, integration, collaboration, public engagement and education, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Although highly complementary, ICSP is different than and separate from other initiatives in BC, namely: the Climate Action Charter; requirements that Official Community Plans contain policies, actions and targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and typical Official Community Plans and/or Regional Growth Strategies.

As well, SPC wants to learn about other sustainability planning processes for rural areas and communities in BC, which are similar to but not carried out as an ICSP initiative.

Directions
The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. You may choose to respond based on your experience with one particular project and/or community, or in a more general fashion based on your experience with a number of projects and/or communities in **rural** areas.

Your answers and identity will be kept confidential. The results of the research will be presented in a final report by July 2012, which will be shared with local governments, interested individuals and the public.

PART ONE: About You and Your Work

1) Are you an: *[check boxes]*
Academic
Consultant
Other (please identify)

2) What is your area of expertise? *Small text box to describe*

3) In which region of BC have you worked and/or gained experience with ICSP - or similar sustainability planning processes - for rural areas and communities? Please indicate as many that apply. *Boxes to check.*
- Vancouver Island/Coast   Cariboo-Chilcotin
- Lower Mainland   Northeast
- Thompson-Okanagan   Northwest
- Kootenays   Northern Interior
- Other (please identify)

PART TWO: About the Sustainability Planning Process

4) Are you or have you been involved in an Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) or similar process, as either a consultant or an academic?
- Yes
- No
- Not sure.

5) How important are each of the following things for creating and conducting a successful sustainability planning process in a rural area or community? Please rate each one. *[very important/ important/ somewhat important/ less important / not important - scale/words next to each one]*
- Financial resources
- Human resources (staff, outside experts and/or volunteers)
- Information and data sources
- Expertise (staff, outside experts and/or volunteers)
- Collaboration with orders of government, agencies and/or community organizations
- Broad promotion
- Community participation
- Simple language
- Support from elected officials and community leaders
- Clear steps in the process
- Results shared with community
- Formal adoption of final document and/or policies
- Commitment to implementation
- Other (please identify and rank its importance): _____

6) What measures or indicators would you use to determine if an ICSP or similar process is a success for a rural area and/or community? *[text box]*

7) What kinds of changes would you anticipate seeing in a rural area and/or community that would indicate that an ICSP or similar process had been successful? *[text box]*

8) The 2005 federal Gas Tax Agreement defines an ICSP process as an approach to local government planning that demonstrates the following seven principles:
   - Long-term thinking – being future oriented over many decades
   - Broad in scope – including economic, environmental, social and cultural elements
   - Integration – coordinating all types of plans or planning activities
   - Collaboration – involving other orders of government and community organizations
   - Public engagement and education – seeking residents' participation
   - Implementation – putting plans into action
   - Monitoring and evaluation – setting targets and tracking results

How suitable is each of these principles for rural areas and small communities?
Very suitable / suitable / somewhat suitable / less suitable / not suitable – next to each principle – have list of principles again but without definitions

9) Are there additional sustainability planning principles which are better suited for rural areas and small communities, compared to urban areas? If yes, please name them and why.
   - *Yes/No [If yes, have a small text box to enter their answer]*

10) Is the definition of sustainability for rural areas and communities different than that for urban areas?
Yes / No/ Don't know   If yes, please describe the main differences *[small text box]*

11) Have you participated in the preparation of a Regional Growth Strategy?
Yes/No - skip logic function; if yes –goes to next question; if no, then to Part Three.

11.1) How well do the objectives required in preparing a Regional Growth Strategy, by the Local Government Act, reflect the ICSP principles?
   Very well / well / somewhat / less well/ not well / don't know

11.2) How suitable is a Regional Growth Strategy process for conducting sustainability planning for rural areas?
   Very suitable / suitable / somewhat / less suitable / not suitable / not sure

PART THREE: About Sustainability Strategies

12) How important are each of the following actions as part of a sustainability strategy for rural areas and/or communities? Please rate each one.
   [extremely important/ important/ somewhat important/ less important / not important - scale/words next to each factor]
   - Protecting agricultural land
   - Supporting food security and local producers
   - Protecting drinking water supplies
   - Promoting energy efficiency
   - Increasing use of renewable energy
   - Developing a district or community energy system
   - Promoting water conservation
   - Pursuing economic diversification

- Supporting locally owned small businesses
- Reducing solid waste
- Promoting and/or providing recycling services
- Preventing urban sprawl
- Preventing rural sprawl
- Supporting higher density development suitable for a small town
- Providing public transit
- Developing walking and/or cycling routes
- Encouraging health and social well being
- Supporting volunteerism and community spirit
- Supporting community organizations
- Other (please identify and rank its importance): _____

13) How realistic (ie. practical, relevant) is it that each the following actions would be implemented, as part of a sustainability strategy for rural areas and/or communities? Please rate each one.
[very realistic / realistic/ somewhat realistic / less realistic/ not realistic - scale/words next to each]
- Protecting agricultural land
- Supporting food security and local producers
- Protecting drinking water supplies
- Promoting energy efficiency
- Increasing use of renewable energy
- Developing a district or community energy system
- Promoting water conservation
- Pursuing economic diversification
- Supporting locally owned small businesses
- Reducing solid waste
- Promoting and/or providing recycling services
- Preventing urban sprawl
- Preventing rural sprawl
- Supporting higher density development suitable for a small town
- Providing public transit
- Developing walking and/or cycling routes
- Encouraging health and social well being
- Supporting volunteerism and community spirit
- Supporting community organizations
- Other (please identify and rank): _____

14) How important are the following factors in choosing appropriate sustainability actions for rural areas and/or communities? Please rate each one.
[extremely important/ important/ somewhat important/ less important / not important - scale/words next to each]
- Size of geographic area served
- Size of the population
- Density of population
- Distances between communities
- Implementation costs
- Long term cost savings
- Willingness of residents
- Support from elected officials and community leaders

- Access to expertise
- Access to funding
- Proximity to urban areas
- Contributes to urban areas in the regional district and/or the province
- Contributes to provincial sustainability goals
- Effective outcomes - will make a difference
- Jurisdictional cooperation
- Other (please identify and rank its importance): _____

15) If you have additional comments, please use the space below.
[have text box]

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

JC Dec 19/11 / Jan. 2012

APPENDIX 3. QUESTIONS for FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

Smart Planning for Communities
Research Project: ICSP and Rural BC

QUESTIONS for FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

1) Has your local government completed, started but not finished, or not yet initiated an ICSP or similar planning process?

2) Is the definition of sustainability for rural areas different than that for urban areas?
   If yes, how? If no, why?

3) Tell me about the best ICS (or similar) Planning process for a rural area or small municipality, with which you are familiar. What characteristics make it the best?

4) How would you determine what constitutes a successful ICS (or similar) Planning process for a rural area and/or small municipality? What measures or indicators would you use?

5) How are sustainability strategies for rural areas different than those for urban areas?

6) What three actions would you include in a strategy to move your rural area or small municipality to being more sustainable?
   a) How did you choose those three; what factors did you consider?
   b) How realistic is it that these three would be implemented?
   c) What is needed to ensure that these three actions are implemented?

JC Feb20/12; Mar2/12