



City of North Vancouver Civic Plaza

North Vancouver Walks the Talk

The City of North Vancouver is on their journey to sustainability using a 100 Year Sustainability Vision for a zero carbon future. With the help of the Fraser Basin Council they took time to reflect on their sustainability strategies.

The City of North Vancouver (CNV) is a community that is well known throughout Canada for their exceptional sustainability planning efforts. They are integrating sustainability into almost every aspect of their economic, environmental and social fabric.

The roots of sustainability for the CNV can be traced back to the 1990s. They were one of the first municipalities in Canada to develop a strong social plan and to put in place meaningful environmental protection measures. The City's first Official

Community Plan (OCP), created in 2002, systematically integrated sustainability concepts. For the implementation of this progressive plan they won the inaugural Green City Award from the province in 2007.

Today the city is implementing a new plan – a sustainability vision that aims to guide the City toward carbon-neutral status by 2107, the City's 200th anniversary. The CNV presently has a dense urban core that is both pedestrian friendly and well serviced by transit, a healthy

jobs-to-resident ratio, and progressive approaches to both energy generation and conservation.

As part of the City's desire to find new ways to improve their sustainability practices they brought in the Fraser Basin Council (FBC). Staff from the Smart Planning for Communities program, and Greater Vancouver Sea to Sky Region provided the City with an objective assessment of their policies, plans and programs from a sustainability perspective. The assessment was accompanied by a set of ideas for enhancing CNV's performance in the future to keep them moving in the right direction.





View of the City of North Vancouver from an approaching seabus showing a variety of housing types, mixed use commercial spaces and the transportation hub of the SeaBus terminal at Lonsdale Quay.

“Arriving by transit on a beautiful spring day, I travelled to meet the CNV staff by SeaBus. What a great way to experience one of the ‘edges’ of this City! Crossing through a bustling working harbour with float planes landing and barges pressing freight through the water, the magnificent old bridge to my left, the City rising up to meet beautiful green mountains ahead of me. I really felt that one of the key defining elements of this place was its relationship with the ocean via Georgia Strait and Burrard Inlet. I realized the water linked it even to my home place in Victoria. I was looking forward to seeing how the City recognized and honoured it’s place at the water’s edge.”
— Angela Evans

OUR FACILITATION SERVICES

There are good reasons to make sustainability a cornerstone of your community plans — to meet gas tax funding commitments, create alignment within your community and most of all, to make your community more efficient, sustainable and resilient.

We help communities of all sizes integrate social, cultural, economic and environmental considerations into planning processes.

With facilitators across the province, we understand urban, suburban and rural issues and the planning needs of small and mid-sized communities.

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BIRD’S EYE VIEW

Holistic long range visioning is one approach that sets North Vancouver apart. Implementation of the City’s vision is being led by passionate project leaders in several of the City Departments such as Finance, IT, Community Development, Facilities, Engineering, and Human Resources.

Suzanne Smith and her colleagues in the Community Development Department are working on plans that will take decades to fully implement. It is important to her to make sure these plans are ‘living documents’ that are synchronized for implementation throughout the municipal structure.

Implementation can be complex. “Sometimes it’s hard to see the big picture, especially when you have a big staff like CNV does,” Smith explains. “Only an outside party can see their work from a ‘bird’s eye view’ which allows us to pin point gaps and deficiencies that they might not be able to see themselves.”

In order to pin point gaps, Richard White, Director of Community Development connected with Angela Evans, Smart Planning for Communities Sustainability Facilitator and Marion Town, Senior Manager, Greater Vancouver Sea-to-Sky Region. The team created an assessment that would take CNV through a three step process. The process would test:

1. the **quality and nature** of guiding municipal policy and procedural documents;
2. the **understanding and implementation** of the documents; and
3. the **effects or impacts** the implementation of those documents have across the broader community.

THE ASSESSMENT

Quality & Nature

The first step involved a review many of CNV’s key policy and guidance documents that represent their expressed commitments, through a sustainability lens. The Smart Planning team reviewed over sixty of the City’s most commonly used documents against the BC Ministry of Community Services Smart Planning Community Assessment Template. During the review the team discovered seven additional sustainability categories being addressed by CNV for a total of 24 theme areas.



North Vancouver's first community garden in Lower Lonsdale

THE REVIEW REVEALED AN OPPORTUNITY TO ENHANCE THE CITY'S WORK BY HELPING PEOPLE MOVE FROM BALANCING ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABILITY TO INTEGRATION

Understanding & Implementation

The next phase involved interviews with a range of CNV staff members. In total 13 staff from eight departments, at varying seniority levels were interviewed in order to gauge their use of CNV's guiding documents. The FBC team, administered a second similar City staff-wide survey in order to help gauge how well the concept of sustainability was understood, how it was incorporated into the work of city staff and to identify barriers to implementation.

Suzanne Smith stated that the survey was very useful to the city as they now have insight into where their level of corporate awareness is on the topic, which is very valuable to them as "no single person leads the sustainability initiatives at the city...so everyone from the top to the bottom needs to know what it means and how to implement it."

Effects or Impacts

The Smart Planning team also reviewed external indicators of sustainability, spanning the economic, social, cultural and environmental realms, in order to help scope complex issues and build understanding by reflecting trends over time. This provided the City with actual measures of their overall health.

THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The summary of findings was organized in an assessment document prepared by FBC entitled, *Measuring and Communicating Sustainability Progress Within the City of North Vancouver*. The assessment found that CNV was well into their sustainability journey with several success factors in place. It also identified some opportunities for the City to strengthen its work.

Success Factors Identified

The assessment revealed that the City's success may be attributed to a variety of factors:

- a Mayor and Council that highly values seeking new ways to help the City reduce its environmental footprint
- a dedicated staff, passionate about sustainability
- a corporate culture of collaboration with other agencies, First Nations and the community
- a collective striving towards increasing community capacity to be more resilient, and to finding innovative solutions in every realm of City influence

The review revealed an opportunity to enhance the City's work by helping people move from balancing aspects of sustainability to integration. Overall, the survey found that the City was doing an exceptional job with respect to fostering the staff's awareness, pride, passion and commitment to sustainability initiatives.



CNV IS NOW LOOKING INTO STARTING A NATURAL ASSET DATABASE, ALSO KNOWN AS ECO-BUDGETING, TO ASSIGN VALUE TO THEIR ECOLOGICAL SERVICES.

Assessment Recommendations


The assessment revealed a few untapped opportunities for integrating sustainability such as; valuing natural assets, cross-appointing advisory committee members, and further reporting mechanisms. The FBC team encouraged further cross-pollination & networking amongst committees; strengthening ties and encouraging increased dialogue with the First Nations groups in the region.

The City had always kept track of their capital assets, i.e. infrastructure, but had not ventured towards the newer concept of tracking their natural ones. “For example, assets like the urban forest, un-compacted soils, a marine shoreline, they all perform services for the community.” noted Angela Evans. As a consequence CNV is now looking into starting a Natural

Asset Database, also known as eco-budgeting, to assign value to their ecological services.

CNV will act on the recommendation for more rigorous reporting of their Targets, Indicators and Monitoring System (TIMS). TIMS which was developed to help track the city’s progress in achieving its 2002 OCP vision. The vision was; *to be a vibrant, diverse and highly livable community that strives to balance the social, economic and environmental needs of our community locally.*

As leaders in sustainability, the City of North Vancouver was not only willing to experiment with a third party assessment of their work, but have taken the findings to heart and are continuing to make constant improvements and strive for excellence.

FBC’s Marion Town explained, “it showed that the decision makers were doing a great job, that the staff was doing a great job, that politicians were thus making good decisions... it is very important to be able to celebrate successes and use them as a means to get better.” 

WHAT THE CITY SAID

“It was great to have [FBC] come in because they validated the choices we have made so far. [FBC] has a sober, independent, objective opinion, which is such an opportune thing that I think every municipality should take advantage of!”
– Richard White, Director of Community Development, CNV

“We appreciate that you were able to provide us with this review...to assist us in making our sustainability goals a reality.”
– Darrell Mussatto, Mayor CNV

“We got a strong benefit from this report in being able to go into the next OCP with a better understanding of what we’ve done to date and where we have left to go... [The Assessment] was a huge value-added for our long-range planning”
– Suzanne Smith, CNV



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