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# Sustainable Highlands

*Summary Document*

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## District of Highlands Integrated Community Sustainability Plan

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# Sustainable Highlands

The District of Highlands is a rural community within the Capital Regional District on Vancouver Island. The Highlands provides highly valued greenspace, trails and recreational opportunities for residents in the community and surrounding areas. Protection of the parkland, natural areas, clean air and water are essential to maintain the nature of the community and the habitat. At the same time, residents are seeking ways to live in their community as sustainably as possible, while keeping its rural nature. The vision outlined in the Highlands' OCP speaks to this desire: *The Highlands will strive to diversify its economy while preserving our natural systems, including the aquifers on which we depend so heavily. Land use decisions will be guided by a community plan, with the ongoing involvement of residents.*

Sustainable Highlands is the community of the Highlands Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) and vision for a sustainable community. The purpose of the Highlands ICSP is to provide a framework to identify what kind of community the Highlands residents want in the year 2030 and what needs to happen now in order to get there. It forms the community's highest level policy that will guide it towards its desired and sustainable future, and will inform all planning, policy development, and decision-making. It comprises a description of nine strategy areas, their descriptions of success, indicators for measuring progress, and specific priority actions that the community can take to become more sustainable.

## Why was Sustainable Highlands developed?

Recognizing a need and a desire for the Highlands to become more sustainable, the District of Highlands Council established a Sustainability Task Force (STF) in January 2009. The task force was asked to help determine the main sustainability issues facing the community and to recommend key initiatives for the District to undertake to address those sustainability challenges.

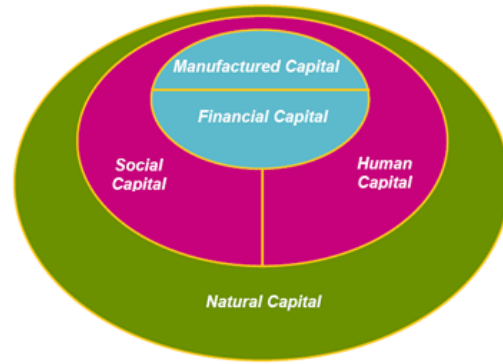
The STF produced a report with 42 recommendations for the District of Highlands to consider in early 2010. Upon review of these recommendations, the District wished to develop a more comprehensive community sustainability plan that would outline a vision for a sustainable Highlands, and provide a framework to clarify and prioritize the recommendations into specific actions along with responsibilities and timelines. The sustainability plan would also include a set of indicators for monitoring and reporting on the state of sustainability in the community.

## How is sustainability defined in the Highlands?

The Sustainability Task Force explored the Five Capitals<sup>1</sup> model developed in the United Kingdom that describes the world according to different types of capital. In this model, manufactured and financial capital exists within social and human capital and all within natural capital. This model is useful for considering the interdependencies people have with the world around them.

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<sup>1</sup> The Five Capitals model emphasizes humankind's reliance on nature and how decision-making needs to comprehensively consider the use of underlying resources, sinks and processes--or capitals--and reverse the trend of global degradation. See: Jonathon Porritt's non-profit [forumforthefuture.org](http://forumforthefuture.org) (a partner with government, business and educational organizations) and book: *Capitalism as if the World Matters*, 2007, Earthscan.



To more specifically describe how to become more sustainable, the Highlands is using objectives derived from The Natural Step (TNS).<sup>2</sup> These four sustainability objectives used to guide the Highlands' vision are:

**We will reduce our dependence on the use of materials extracted from the Earth's Crust and the creation of associated wastes.** We will work towards the use of renewable low-impact resources, such as solar energy, and not depend on limited resources taken from the earth.

**We will reduce our contribution to the progressive build-up of synthetic materials produced by society.** We will create or use manufactured products that can be easily absorbed in an environmentally benign way, such as packaging made out of compostable materials.

**We will reduce our contribution to the ongoing physical degradation of nature.** We will use resources only from well-managed eco-systems, pursuing the most productive and efficient use of those resources. We will exercise caution when modifying the natural environment.

**We will reduce our contribution to conditions that undermine people's ability to meet their basic needs.** We will support and maintain socio-cultural and economic systems that promote a quality of life for people that include food security, affordable housing, and a living wage.

### **Who was involved in the development of Sustainable Highlands?**

The Highlands' ICSP was developed with the significant input and work of the Sustainability Strategy Advisory Committee (SSAC), who were appointed by Council to oversee the process and provide ongoing input. The SSAC comprised a cross-section of community members with expertise in various sustainability areas, and included several members of the former Sustainability Task Force. They were:

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1989 in Sweden by oncologist Dr. Karl-Henrik Robert, the Natural Step is a non-profit organization with offices in 12 countries that work with hundreds of corporations, municipalities, academic institutions and non-profit organizations to help them achieve their sustainability goals. See: [thenaturalstep.org](http://thenaturalstep.org)

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## How will the Sustainable Highlands ICSP guide decision-making?

Sustainable Highlands is the community's highest level policy. All decisions should be guided by the visions described in each of the strategy areas so that all plans, policies and actions continue to move the community toward its sustainability vision.

## Strategy Areas

Sustainable Highlands is organized into nine strategy areas:

 Buildings and Sites	 Healthy Community
 Economy and Work	 Land Use and Natural Areas
 Education and Leisure	 Transportation and Mobility
 Energy	 Water and Waste
 Food	

Each strategy area describes a set of systems that makes up a community. Within each strategy area, a set of 'Descriptions of Success' were created – these statements describe what the Highlands will look like when it becomes a sustainable community. The Descriptions of Success are aspirational statements that are meant to guide decisions and actions to move the Highlands towards its vision. The year 2030 was selected as a milestone in the future for becoming a sustainable community.

A 'current reality' – a high level scan of the current situation in the Highlands – was done for each strategy to provide a description of where each strategy is currently at. It forms the baseline from which action planning is done.

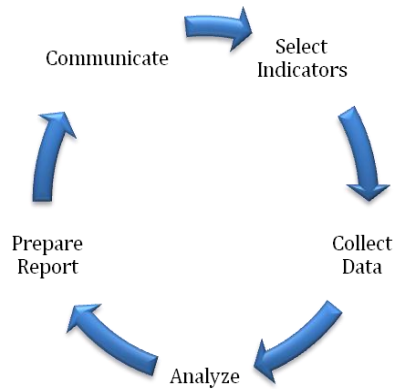
## Indicators

Annual, ongoing monitoring is part of any community planning process and is important to:

- Inform decision-making throughout the community;
- Inform action planning;
- Ensure transparency and accountability to community stakeholders;
- Engage businesses, community members and visitors in the journey toward the vision by providing meaningful and timely information in an interactive way.

A set of 26 core indicators was identified for monitoring progress towards the Highlands' sustainability vision. These indicators were selected based on the following criteria:

- Will measure progress towards the Highlands' described vision in each strategy area;
- Data is readily accessible (i.e. would not require additional resources to collect the data);
- Reliable – will provide consistently measured data over time;
- Can be benchmarked, or compared, with other communities where possible.



While collecting and reporting on community indicators is an essential part of a complete monitoring and reporting system, it is also very useful to informally collect qualitative data on sustainability progress. This can be done annually through a discussion of the SSAC with the District of Highlands, through a survey (e.g. Survey Monkey) based on the descriptions of success, and through informal community cafes hosted by the municipality, etc. The intent of this type of process is to gather perceptions and qualitative feedback on whether the community is moving forward toward sustainability.

## Actions!



Identifying specific actions that community partners can take on to move the community toward its vision may be the most fun part of a sustainability plan and process. Each year, community partners should come together to determine the actions and initiatives that can be undertaken to help make the Highlands more sustainable. For Sustainable Highlands, an initial set of nine actions was recommended for immediate implementation; these actions were prioritized from the forty-two initial recommendations of the Sustainability Task Force to be initiated the first year of the sustainability plan. These actions were selected based on criteria such as ease of implementation, impact, and how effectively they would address the descriptions of success. The other recommendations will be considered at future action planning sessions, and new actions will be developed by determining where priorities need to be focused.

For 2012, the Highlands will:

- ✓ Develop and adopt a sustainability appraisal form for buildings and developments;
- ✓ Hold training sessions on how to use and implement the Highlands ICSP with committees and community groups;
- ✓ Create a volunteer Local Food Production Task Force that would promote local food production and consumption;
- ✓ Create an ongoing, interactive sustainability section on the District of Highlands website;
- ✓ Develop and implement a communications strategy for the Highlands ICSP;
- ✓ Develop policies for protection and restoration of representative Coastal Douglas-Fir habitat in all land use and development policies, regulations and decisions;
- ✓ Create a carpooling and park-n-ride strategy;
- ✓ Implement the Roadside Trail Plan and cycling lanes;
- ✓ Task CISSC to provide annual recommendations to Council on strategies to reduce car use in the Highlands.

## Buildings and Sites

### Summary of Current Reality in 2010

The Highlands is a rural community consisting mainly of single family residential homes within a greenspace environment with substantial parkland. While most buildings were built before green building standards, there are an increasing number of impressive examples (the EcoSense<sup>3</sup> home being the most notable) in the community to follow. Outside of the Highlands Servicing Area as shown in the Official Community Plan (OCP), there is no future vision for infrastructure to support high density residential development. This is affirmed in the Regional Growth Strategy, demonstrating the municipal to regional commitment to maintain the Highlands' rural character. Secondary suites, though not regulated, are currently a common way of increasing housing availability.



### Descriptions of Success

By the year 2030 in the Highlands,

1. New residential, commercial, industrial and institutional development conforms to the long term vision of the community.
2. New and renovated buildings use water and energy conservation measures, have low-impact design and are mostly built with sustainable materials.
3. Scale of development and overall impact on natural areas has no net-negative environmental impact.
4. Heritage buildings, heritage landscapes and archaeological sites are preserved.
5. The form and character of buildings and sites reflect the rural character of the community.
6. The costs of extending services for new developments are borne by the development. Ongoing costs for services are borne primarily by the owner of the property being serviced.
7. Buildings are free of toxic materials.
8. There is housing in the community accessible for people of all abilities (physical and economic).
9. Ornamental landscaped areas consist of non-invasive plant species that minimize the need for use of potable water for irrigation and of chemical pesticides and fertilizers.
10. Community members will be involved in the green building sector.

### Priority Action for 2012

Develop and adopt a sustainability appraisal form for buildings and developments.

#### Key Indicators

Decreased square footage in new buildings and renovations

Green buildings

Housing affordability

Renewable energy installations

<sup>3</sup> The EcoSense home is a state of the art energy and water efficient home, earning the highest points in green building design.

## Economy and Work

### Summary of Current Reality in 2010

Highlanders have high incomes and high levels of education, relative to the rest of BC. While the majority of Highlanders work outside of the community, requiring travel, there is a large percentage of home-based businesses as well. The abundance of parkland provides opportunities for increased tourism and recreation. There are strong policies in place for diversifying the economy within the rural context, including forestry, agriculture and tourism. Currently, there are no commercial centres, but some desire to provide some infrastructure to foster more locally-based business opportunities and a more diversified tax base.

#### Descriptions of Success

By the year 2030 in the Highlands,

1. An increased proportion of income is generated through business and employment opportunities located in the community.
2. Business licensing is subject to an appraisal to determine suitability based on the environmental, social, economic impacts and sustainability principles.
3. There is small scale agriculture and forestry suitably located and consistent with land capability and environmental constraints.
4. Recreational, cultural and tourism uses are consistent with environmental and community values and are integral part of the Highlands economy.
5. Appropriate communications services are available to support local and regional enterprise.
6. Businesses make the highest and best use of natural materials as they move toward more sustainable business practices.
7. Learning activities help develop local economies and a skilled workforce for the local and regional economy.
8. There is appropriate development of commercial and industrial lands to help diversify the local economy.
9. An informal system of sharing goods and services exists to support the local community.
10. The District has mechanisms in place for financial sustainability over the long term.

#### Priority Action for 2012

The Sustainability Strategy Advisory Committee did not recommend an economy and work-related priority action for 2012.

Key Indicators
Unemployment rate
Place of work
Median income
Ratio of ongoing annual reserve contributions to depreciation/replacement costs of municipal assets.



## Education and Leisure

### Summary of Current Reality in 2010

The Highlands is home to significant parkland and recreational trails. Arts and cultural activities are numerous and highly valued. The cost of living in the Highlands is relatively high, which may be prohibitive for self-employed artists and crafters. No formal educational opportunities exist in the Highlands, but the community contributes to regional educational services and infrastructure.



### Descriptions of Success

By the year 2030 in the Highlands,

1. Community members of all ages have access to formal and informal learning opportunities and are encouraged to be life-long participants in learning, arts and cultural activities.
2. Leisure activities have minimal impact on the environment, are consistent with the rural ambiance and an integral part of the Highlands community.
3. The park system allows access to a range of ecosystems for people of all abilities.
4. The park system provides non-motorized recreational opportunities.
5. Heritage values related to places, events and eras are a recognized and celebrated aspect of community knowledge.
6. There are ongoing educational opportunities related to the environment such as green buildings, forest management, food production, and natural history.
7. Artists and artisans have opportunities to present their craft.
8. Recreation, learning and arts form part of the local economy.

### Priority Action for 2012

Hold training sessions on how to use and implement the Highlands ICSP with committees and community groups.

#### Key Indicators

Park availability

Education attainment

Trail length

Number of trail connections

## Energy

### Summary of Current Reality in 2010

The majority of energy use and emissions in the Highlands is from transportation, largely due to a dispersed land use pattern. At least 90% of all building energy use is for residential buildings and most homes in the Highlands are relatively large. The Highlands is home to the EcoSense home (pictured on the Buildings and Sites page), one of the world's greenest buildings. There is significant interest and desire to use more green building and energy efficient technologies and practices for new and retrofit buildings. There is some potential to explore renewable energy sources such as solar.

### Descriptions of Success

By the year 2030 in the Highlands,

1. Community members and local businesses are knowledgeable about energy and understand principles of conservation, efficiency, generation, storage and transmittance.
2. Homes use significantly less energy. Conservation of energy is achieved through increased efficiency and life style choices.
3. "Net-zero" energy, water and zero-waste is the standard for all developments.
4. Energy systems are based on renewable sources and are efficient, clean and integrated.

### Priority Action for 2012

The Sustainability Strategy Advisory Committee did not recommend an energy-related priority action for 2012.

Key Indicators
Total energy use
Energy use per capita
Energy use by category type
Total GHG emissions
GHG emissions per capita

## Food

### Summary of Current Reality in 2010

Highlanders have a strong interest in food security and resilience. Although there is little arable land in the Highlands, there is a desire and potential for more home-based food systems and the ability to buy food grown more locally and sustainably. There is a farmers' market and a proven demand for more sustainable, locally-grown food.

### Descriptions of Success

By the year 2030 in the Highlands,

1. More community members grow food.
2. There are community gardens, demonstration operations, food sharing networks, and sale of locally grown produce through farm gate sales and the Highlands' Market.
3. Community members are consuming more locally and regionally organically grown food.
4. Food waste is increasingly diverted from landfills to composting. .
5. The community is knowledgeable about food: growing seasons and zones, the social, economic and environmental benefits and impacts of growing its own food.
6. There is a common vision for a sustainable food system that is integrated with the region.
7. The food system comprises chemical free, water conserving, organically grown products, transported sustainably, and is available year-round at prices affordable to all in the region.



### Priority Action for 2012

Create a volunteer Local Food Production Task Force that would promote local food production and consumption.

#### Key Indicators

Number of community events related to food
Number of vendors at each community event
Hectares of active farms
Number of households growing food

## Healthy Community

### Summary of Current Reality in 2010

The Highlands relies on an active volunteer community, in particular, for fire protection services; however, recruitment of an adequate number of firefighters remains an issue. The prevalence of parks and trails provides easy access to recreational opportunities, supporting a more active lifestyle. Primary health services are not available within the Highlands but are accessible in nearby Victoria. Policies and the culture encourage and support volunteering and participating in community life. There are a number of volunteer organizations and networks in the community.

### Descriptions of Success

By the year 2030 in the Highlands,

1. The community is thriving, built upon trust, common core values and a sense of belonging. Meaningful opportunities exist for participation in all aspects of community living and decision making.
2. The community is diverse, inclusive and respects and understands a broad spectrum of viewpoints.
3. A strong volunteer base exists within the community.
4. A broad range of housing options exists to support multiple generations and all income groups.
5. Community members support their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health through access to regional prevention and treatment services.
6. Safety and protection services continue to engage in prevention activities and respond to crime and emergencies.
7. The community and visitors celebrate the Highlands' natural environment and participate in activities to help protect it.

### Priority Actions for 2012

Create an ongoing, interactive sustainability section on the District of Highlands website.

Develop and implement a communications strategy for the Highlands ICSP.

Key Indicators
MSP requirement rate
Unlawful incidents
Local events
Population changes
Safety service personnel

## Land Use and Natural Areas

### Summary of Current Reality in 2010

The Highlands is a rural community with largely residential properties nestled in the natural landscape. The Regional Growth Strategy identifies no long term role for the Highlands as an area for urban development. The Highlands has strong groundwater protection policies; groundwater availability and protection of ecosystems are heavily considered in any land development proposals. The Highlands is developing tools to strengthen environmental protection and greenhouse gas reductions.



### Descriptions of Success

By the year 2030 in the Highlands,

1. Land uses support residential, employment, tourism and recreational activities, and are consistent with the rural character of the Highlands.
2. All land use and design decisions seek to prevent unplanned growth, minimize impacts on the environment, and are based on an analysis of impacts on the social, human, financial, natural and manufactured capital of the community.
3. Land uses minimize encroachment on and ensure protection of natural areas.
4. Environmentally sensitive natural areas are protected through new and existing land use controls. These include lands with the potential for surface erosion or slope instability, rare ecosystems and archaeological and historic sites. Sustainable forestry management practices are applied and are well integrated with environmental conservation and protection goals.
5. Public and privately-held green corridors protect and maintain ecological connectivity both within the Highlands and to natural areas outside the Highlands.
6. Land uses and activities are compatible and integrated with the ecosystem functions, maintenance of viewsapes and other important environmental characteristics.
7. The night sky environment is preserved.
8. Recreational amenities such as meeting places, buildings, trails and playgrounds are situated, built, and maintained to minimize impact on natural landscape and ecosystems.
9. Natural ecosystems are protected from the impacts of development or other human activity through stewardship, conservation and restoration activities.

### Priority Actions for 2012

Develop policies for protection and restoration of representative Coastal Douglas-Fir habitat in all land use and development policies, regulations and decisions.

Key Indicators	
Impervious surfaces	Sensitive habitat
Build-out	Wildlife connectivity

## Transportation and Mobility

### Summary of Current Reality in 2010

The rural and expansive nature of the community necessitates the use of private vehicles as the predominant mode of transportation. Half of the energy use within the community is from resident automobile transportation related activities. Although service levels are minimal, there is currently daily commuter-type transit, and a desire to increase transit and carpooling options. Trails currently are mainly used for recreation, but there are opportunities to expand roadside trails to encourage more use of cycling.



### Descriptions of Success

By the year 2030 in the Highlands,

1. Road safety, long term durability and environmental protection guide decisions regarding road design, construction and maintenance and reflect the rural character of the Highlands.
2. Roads are safe for pedestrians and cyclists.
3. Roads and pathways are constructed to minimize width of cleared areas and hard surfaces.
4. There is an inter-modal transportation system to reduce the use of automobiles.
5. A variety of transportation nodes and corridors that are safe, attractive, convenient, and well used by community members and visitors link the Highlands to regional transportation networks.
6. An expanded network of non-motorized trails exists.
7. There are a greater number of accessible and energy efficient transportation options available.
8. Social and support networks help reduce the number of daily car trips through carpooling and assisting with errands.

### Priority Actions for 2012

Create a carpooling and park-n-ride strategy.

Implement the Roadside Trail Plan and cycling lanes.

Task the Community Infrastructure and Services Select Committee to provide annual recommendations to Council on strategies to reduce car use in the Highlands.

### Key Indicators

Registered vehicles

Number of people who carpool

BC Transit ridership

## Water and Waste

### Summary of Current Reality in 2010

The Highlands has an active groundwater task force and strong desire and policies to conserve and protect water sources. Current solid waste includes a significant portion of compostable materials that could be separated from the waste stream. Recycling facilities exist and there are opportunities to increase recycling programs.

### Descriptions of Success

By the year 2030 in the Highlands,

1. Human activities do not contribute to flooding, increased water run-off, soil erosion, or slope instability.
2. The basic ecological and hydrological functions of watersheds are enhanced and continue to support biodiversity.
3. Human activities in watersheds are managed to maintain natural drainage systems so as to protect water quality, to optimize groundwater recharge, manage summer flows and to minimize runoff damage in long term (eg 100-year) flood scenarios.
4. The supply of potable water from local natural sources is maintained for future generations.
5. Water is conserved through minimizing use, enhancing water retention, rain water harvesting and use of grey water.
6. The use of composting toilets is increasing and bio-solids are composted.
7. Solid waste is minimized through reduced consumption, backyard composting, and recycling.
8. Toxic substances are eliminated, replaced or managed in a way that is not harmful to human health or the environment. Very little plastic is used, and the plastic that is used is fully recyclable.



### Priority Actions for 2012

Priority actions regarding water were delegated to the Groundwater Task Force. There were no priority actions for waste for 2012.

#### Key Indicators

Groundwater supply

Material use

## Ongoing implementation

Creation of the ICSP is just the first step of many in a community's journey toward sustainability. In order to ensure the Highlands continues to move towards its vision for sustainability, it needs to continue to develop and implement actions and initiatives each year, as well as annually monitor and report on progress.

While the nine strategies were used as a starting point for creating a vision and for action planning, these strategies can be amalgamated or separated into more specific issues for future action planning as different issues and priorities arise. Upon reflection, there was consideration of amalgamating the nine strategies into six; this should be discussed at a future date after some of the initial actions have been implemented. How the strategies are defined or grouped should reflect the community's priorities and effectiveness for action planning.

Action planning can be done by one ongoing committee, or task forces can be created to address individual strategies. The District of Highlands needs to develop partnerships with community organizations so that all partners take the lead on implementing actions, not just the District of Highlands. All partners also need to incorporate and embed the ICSP into all plans, policies and processes so that it becomes a way of making decisions in the whole community.

With a plan in place and a process for ongoing implementation, the Highlands is well on its way towards its vision for sustainability!