

A landscape photograph of Ladysmith, British Columbia, showing a town nestled in a valley with mountains in the background. The word "LADYSMITH" is overlaid in large, bold, dark letters.

LADYSMITH

A community vision for a
sustainable west coast town.

Sustainable Community Visioning Project

Town of Ladysmith

July 22, 2009

**Union of BC Municipalities
2009 Community Excellence Awards
Leadership & Innovation (mid sized community)**



TOWN OF LADYSMITH

410 Esplanade, P.O. Box 220, Ladysmith, BC V9G 1A2
Municipal Hall (250) 245-6400 • Fax (250) 245-6411 • info@town.ladysmith.bc.ca • www.town.ladysmith.bc.ca

July 20, 2009

2009 Community Excellence Awards
Union of British Columbia Municipalities
60-10551 Shellbridge Way
Richmond, BC V6X 2W9

Attention: Angela Elliot, Executive Coordinator

Dear Ms. Elliot,

Re: Town of Ladysmith Sustainable Community Visioning Project

On behalf of Council, I am pleased to submit the Ladysmith Sustainable Community Visioning Project to the Union of BC Municipalities' 2009 Community Excellence Awards in the Leadership and Innovation Category.

Quality of life in Ladysmith is exceptionally high. Nestled on the spectacular eastern shores of Vancouver Island, our community offers all of the charm and security of small town living, along with a full compliment of services and facilities comparable to a much larger urban centre. Proximity to major transportation networks and an expansive array of year-round, outdoor recreation has made Ladysmith a very highly desirable destination to live, work and play.

Not surprisingly, Ladysmith has experienced significant population growth and development activity in recent years. In 2008, Council considered a number of development applications that were considerably larger in scope than past applications had tended to be – a trend which began to fuel a growing sense of angst and concern in the community.

As the indications of worry continued to intensity, Council decided to 'press pause' on development approvals so that the community, including the Chemainus First Nation, could be consulted in a very meaningful form of citizen engagement designed to afford participants the opportunity to reflect, share and help shape a vision for the future of the community that emphasized environmental leadership and sustainability.

.../2

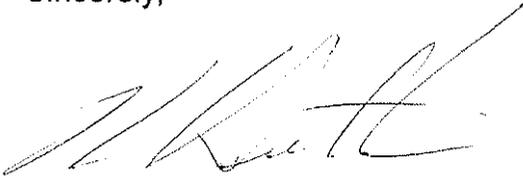
The Ladysmith Sustainability Community Visioning Project was officially launched in August, 2008 in partnership with HBLanarc Consulting of Nanaimo, BC. The project involved a series of six very intense, interactive workshops with the community in which they were asked to participate in a range of activities designed to elicit personal reflections, meaningful experiences and thoughtful dialogue around sustainability, the environment and the future of our community. Participation levels were impressive – over 600 participants took part in six workshops and online feedback opportunities.

While the key deliverable of the project for the Town was the development of comprehensive community sustainability plan complete with very detailed and technical planning recommendations, an equally valuable outcome was the increased level of trust, understanding and mutual respect between municipal leaders and the community.

I truly believe that this innovative project is an exceptional achievement for a community of our size. It has shown that the most successful leadership can be demonstrated simply by listening. The Town's collaborative, original and highly inclusive approach to sustainability visioning and planning has strong potential to become a model for other municipalities, and can surely be replicated in even the largest communities.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to learning the results of your deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Hutchins', written in a cursive style.

Rob Hutchins, Mayor
Town of Ladysmith



PROJECT SUMMARY

The Ladysmith Sustainable Community Visioning Project was launched in August, 2008 in response to growing concern in the community regarding ongoing development pressures and population growth. The initiative engaged the community in a very innovative, original and highly interactive form aimed at creating a sustainability-focused vision and action plan for the community. This approach yielded extraordinary levels of community participation, and the process was regarded as having been highly successful and exceptionally meaningful for all involved. The resulting Sustainability Plan and associated planning tools and recommendations are truly reflective of the community's preferences regarding the future of Ladysmith. The Town will be forever richer for having paused to truly listen to the wishes of the community respecting sustainability and community growth, and the municipality is now eager to share their success story with communities who may benefit from Ladysmith's leadership, innovation and lessons learned.



PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT

Project Status: Complete

(Start Date: August, 2008; Sustainability Plan adopted by Council Jan. 26, 2009)

Background

The Town of Ladysmith has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, fuelled mainly by its stunning coastal landscape, mild climate, small-town tranquility, proximity to larger cities, and remarkable community spirit.

Throughout the growth and change, Town of Ladysmith has distinguished itself as a leading community with respect to environmental sustainability, garnering several provincial and even national awards. Some of the community's most notable achievements in recent years include curb side organic waste collection; reclaimed water from water park used for landscape irrigation as well as park toilets; established an Environmental Commission; developed a Community Energy Plan; worked with the Province, First Nations, and private development to incorporate green development into the waterfront with a focus on harbour clean-up; eliminated use of pesticides and toxic products in municipal parks; commenced use of native low-drought plantings and turf program; planted and tended vegetable gardens at City Hall with several pounds of produce donated to the food bank; and introduced a low-flow toilet rebate program.

Despite the Town's many innovations and awards, the impact of continued population growth and related development remained a concern, particularly with respect to environmental sustainability and the form and character of the community.

In 2008, after having considered a number of development applications that were considerably larger in magnitude and scope than was typical for the community, Council felt strongly that the anxiety had reached a pinnacle, and that a new approach was required in order to truly connect and respond to the changing needs and concerns of the community.

As a result, Council decided, in an unprecedented move, to halt the development approvals process in the summer of 2008 in order to undertake an extensive community engagement process aimed at shaping a vision for the future of the community with an emphasis on environmental sustainability. The initiative was known as the Ladysmith Sustainable Community Visioning Project.

Methodology

Ladysmith's Sustainable Community Visioning initiative employed a very original and holistic approach in that it engaged the community, including the Chemainus First Nation, in a very extensive and highly participatory process over several months.

Council believed very strongly that community buy-in and commitment would be absolutely critical to the success of a sustainability plan, and therefore endorsed a process that would afford participants an opportunity to be directly involved in and help shape the outcome.

The key goals of the project were as follows:

1. To develop a sustainability strategy for the Town;
2. To articulate a clear vision for the future of Ladysmith, as created by the community;
3. To ensure the vision was 'actionable' immediately in terms of priorities and direction for development;
4. To build a greater sense of shared vision and collective buy-in for future directions and decisions in Ladysmith.

The consulting team that was hired to lead the process – HB Lanarc of Nanaimo, BC – designed a consultation plan that emphasized experience-driven planning, as opposed to conventional planning processes. Experience-driven planning focuses on what matters most to residents, and their experiences of their community, in order to provide guidance and directives that will result in development consistent with the community's preferences.

A total of over 600 participants attended six workshops held over the course of two months:

Overall Vision & Character Workshop – August 23, 2008

This Workshop focused on exploring and mapping the great experiences participants have had in Ladysmith, where the special places are, and options Ladysmith has for its future identity, character and development directions.

Sustainable Development Strategy Workshop – September 6, 2008

This workshop involved an intense day of exploring sustainability issues and opportunities for land use, transportation, buildings, infrastructure, open space, food systems, social health and economic development. The resulting sustainability strategy will serve as a policy foundation for all future development in the Town.

Downtown Vision and Character Workshop – September 18, 2008

This workshop focused on the downtown area, including mapping key places and areas where heritage values need to be retained. The strategy for a healthy downtown that would offer great experiences was explored and outlined and character preferences for future development identified.

Holland Creek Vision and Character Workshop – September 30, 2008

This workshop focused on several hundred acres on the edge of the downtown, adjacent to Holland Creek Park and Trail area. The participants explored options for the land uses and character of a future village on the site, including discussing how to minimize impacts on the area and fit new development with the existing community character and function.

Waterfront Vision and Character Workshop – October 4, 2008

This workshop focused on the Town's waterfront area, addressing opportunities to offer great waterfront experiences and to support the Town's overall goals of sustainability and prosperity.

Draft Vision Review Workshop – October 18, 2008

This workshop focused on reviewing the draft vision and character preferences that the consulting team had gathered from the large amount of feedback. Participants reviewed the results form each of the previous 5 workshops and offered additional thoughts on refinements and additions that were important to better reflect a shared vision of sustainability and greatness for Ladysmith's future.

Each workshop had several dimensions, including educational presentations on a wide range of issues related to community planning; evocative questions that were designed to elicit personal thoughts, ideas, memories and preferences on various aspects of the community; small group discussions; and image surveys, which involved evaluating and commenting on hundreds of images of various communities. Each participant recorded their responses to the evocative questions and image surveys in a personal workbook, which was provided to the consultants at the end of the workshops.

Input was also gathered online through the use of three internet tools: a Facebook site; a Myspace page and a FLKR site. A supplementary workshop was hosted by the Mayor and staff at Ladysmith Senior Secondary, where high school students were asked to record their thoughts and ideas in response to a sampling of the evocative questions that were explored throughout the workshop series.

The Chemainus First Nation were formally invited to attend each workshop, and special speaking opportunities were offered to representatives. Town Council and the Chemainus First Nations Band Council meet monthly as per the 2007 Community Accord. The Band Council was provided with updates and information throughout the Sustainability Visioning process.

Results

The key deliverables to the Town included:

- a report summarizing the community vision and sustainability strategy (see attached);
- a visual handbook and conceptual design guidelines for a wide range of elements and areas of the Town based on preferred images from the image surveys;
- a background content document that contains significantly more explanatory and detailed information on each of the key issues reviewed through the process – this document will be used primarily by Town staff in their planning and development negotiation process;

- a poetic document written by a creative writer that was engaged to capture the spirit of the vision and convey some of the magic of the experience that had occurred throughout the process;
- a dictation of all feedback that was received from participants.

The overarching sustainability strategy outlines a core set of sustainability goals and establishes 8 pillars of sustainability for Ladysmith, which are discussed in more detail below.

Benefits

The most significant and direct benefits of this project include:

- the creation of a tremendously valuable tool that will help shape the Town's legislative framework with respect to community planning, sustainability and development;
- development of a clear vision and statement of community expectations with respect to sustainable development helps to remove uncertainty and potential conflict from the development approvals process;
- educational sessions on a broad range of planning topics has empowered the community – the community is informed and educated, clear on their expectations and aware of what is possible with respect to sustainable, quality development;
- the inclusive and highly participatory approach led to an increased sense of trust, respect and understanding between local government leaders, residents and developers.

Environmental Impact

As noted above, the enclosed Sustainability Plan establishes eight pillars of sustainability for Ladysmith:

- i. Complete community land use
- ii. Low impact transportation
- iii. Green buildings
- iv. Multi-use landscapes
- v. Innovative infrastructure
- vi. Local food systems
- vii. Healthy community
- viii. Local, diverse economy

The plan focuses on extending the eight pillars of sustainability throughout all areas of the Town. It outlines strategies, opportunities and objectives for sustainable development within the community in the short and long-term.

Innovation & Leadership

The Town of Ladysmith showed tremendous leadership and courage when they decided to halt the development approvals process in order to undertake an extensive sustainability visioning and planning process with the community.

The engagement process, itself, was original and innovative. Council's commitment to investing the time necessary to have a meaningful and engaging dialogue with the community was a true demonstration of leadership. The emphasis on experiential planning encouraged the use of creativity and imagination in a discipline that is often regarded as being overly technical and complicated. This unique approach made the process an accessible, enjoyable and highly satisfying experience for participants.

The inclusive and highly participatory approach has the potential to become a model for community engagement, specifically with respect to sustainability planning. The process and resulting Sustainability Plan is an exceptional achievement for a mid-sized community – one that can certainly be learned from and replicated in even the largest urban cities.