

## ICSP Tool introduced by Royal Roads' researchers

by Dr. Chris Ling

BC communities, both large and small, are uniquely and enviably positioned to enable and encourage sustainable development. With the help of tools such as 'integrated community sustainability (ICS) planning,' they can build the frameworks needed to foster social, cultural, environmental, and economic well-being.

As part of its research on sustainable community development, the School of Environment and Sustainability at Victoria's Royal Roads University recently introduced an ICS Planning Tool, complete with strategies for public engagement and useful research and practitioner links. Read on to see how this, and other tools and programs, could help your community nail its sustainability targets...

The ICS planning tool — developed by Drs. Chris Ling, Ann Dale, and Kevin Hanna — presents a series of steps and questions for communities to build their own ICS plans, and supports these steps with an introduction to a number of tools and techniques that are now available and readily accessible. Although uniquely designed for the Canadian experience, the tools and techniques described have come from a wide range of planning and municipal governance contexts.

What this tool is not is a proscriptive attempt to create a 'one-size-fits-all' approach for sustainable community development. By definition, an ICS planning differs from conventional planning by being collaboratively developed in the community through participation that allows for the full involvement and engagement with the socio-economic life of the community, and the natural system upon which the community depends.

The tool supports the premise that integrated planning requires the strategic consideration of connectivity (temporal and spatial) among landscape, planning and development actions and social well-being. An integrated approach is holistic, planning focussed, and inherently strategic. Such an approach considers the implications of human-induced change for landscape integrity and environmental and social sustainability.

There can be little doubt that the opposite of integration — fragmentation — remains a substantial obstacle to improving local planning. Fragmented interests, jurisdictions, ownership, planning responsibilities, budget allocations, social and ecological systems, information, and knowledge all contribute to the challenge of planning on an integrated and sustainable basis. Addressing this fragmentation, in governance and conceptual thinking, is an essential part of making the ever-more necessary fundamental changes for sustainable community development.



Researchers who developed the ICS planning tool are looking to refine the template by working with BC communities to determine its effectiveness. If you are interested in using the tool in partnership with us, please contact [chris.ling@royalroads.ca](mailto:chris.ling@royalroads.ca).

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## Understanding ICS Planning...

*by Joanne de Vries*

In 2004, the federal government embarked on a New Deal for Cities and Communities to help make Canadian municipalities more sustainable. An outcome of the New Deal was a \$5-billion, five year Gas Tax Fund (GTF) designed to help local governments achieve three specific sustainability outcomes: reduced gas emissions, cleaner water, and cleaner air.

The GTF — which the 2007 federal budget extended to 2014 with an additional \$2 billion per year — supports environmentally sustainable municipal infrastructure for public transit, water and wastewater treatment, community energy systems, solid waste management, and local roads and bridges that enhance sustainability outcomes.

The fund also provides funding for communities to increase their planning capacities. As defined in the 2005 Canada/BC/UBCM Gas Tax Agreement (GTA), capacity-building projects are "activities that strengthen the ability of local governments to develop and implement integrated community sustainability (ICS) planning." And ICS planning is described as "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."

In BC, every local government that receives gas tax funds must commit to undertaking ICS Planning. Given that all communities outside Metro Vancouver (formerly the Greater Vancouver Regional District) have received or will receive portions of BC's \$1.6-billion million fund, many communities will be embarking on ICS Planning for the first time.

### ICSP FUNDAMENTALS

Historically, municipal planning has been focused on land use and the amount and location of development. Other planning processes (e.g., for infrastructure, economic development, and environmental protection) have not been strategically integrated.

The purpose of ICS planning, as identified by Infrastructure Canada, "is to broaden the scope of factors considered in municipal planning and decision-making." This is achieved through participatory processes that encourage all stakeholders to consider the social, cultural, environmental, and economic impacts of potential decisions, and then to explore practical solutions for specific community challenges. As a result, "communities can better understand their futures and work collectively toward achieving their goals."

More specific outcomes include cost savings, enhanced community capacity, stronger and more creative communities, more effective policy development, greater community cohesion, stronger regional links, and the ability to better manage change.

Research and local government experience indicate that successful sustainability planning requires that communities:

- **Involve the public**, recognizing that sustainability cannot be achieved, nor significant progress made toward it, without the involvement and support of the whole community
- **Undertake comprehensive analysis** of long-term social, cultural, environmental, and economic impacts of current and future decisions
- **Conduct integrated and strategic planning** that considers other plans and planning processes
- **Focus on goals, performance indicators, and intended outcomes**
- **Encourage diversity** (one size does not fit all)
- **Consider equity** and the impacts of decisions on future generations
- **Use market principles** such as consumer choice, full-cost pricing, and economic neutrality
- **Apply the 'precautionary principle'** which emphasizes the importance of incorporating risks into decision-making and favouring policies that minimize those risks
- **Adopt a conservation ethic** to increase efficiency and reduce resource consumption
- **Commit to transparency, accountability, and reporting** throughout the process(s)
- **Make continual improvements** (even small and incremental ones) using new science and technology
- **Guarantee implementation, ongoing evaluation, and continued refinements to the plan.**

In addition, BC's Ministry of Community Services recommends that ICS processes and the resulting plans be relevant to local circumstances and build on local strengths. They should be innovative and flexible so that they can be applied at different scales within the community.

They should also reflect local governments' commitment to community leadership (e.g., ensuring sustainability principles are reflected in policies, regulations, purchasing practices, and internal programs). And they should harness the synergies of other community, regional, and provincial programs such as BC Healthy Communities, the Mountain Pine Beetle Program, Community Action on Energy Efficiency, and the Real Estate Foundation's Communities in Transition program.

## PLANNING PHASES

ICS planning processes can be divided into three phases: pre-planning, core planning, and implementation.

**Pre-planning** can involve activities ranging from public education to the assessment of planning capacity. MCS offers a template to help local governments identify where to begin. Gas tax funding up to \$5000 is available for a community assessment. Consult the Capacity-Building and ICS Planning Guide on the UBCM website for information about how to apply for funding.

**Core planning** leads to the development of a community sustainability vision and a planning framework to help identify potential targets and actions. The Natural Step and Smart Growth are just two examples of ICSP planning approaches being used by BC communities.

The Natural Step focuses on working more effectively within natural systems, identifying practices that are unsustainable, and implementing actions to mitigate them. Whistler used this approach to guide its Whistler 2020 process, and the City of Dawson Creek is using The Natural Step to inform its sustainability planning process.

Smart Growth encourages communities to engage in planning processes directed at land-use with a focus on reducing urban sprawl. The City of Maple Ridge, the District of Squamish, and the Town of Oliver have used Smart Growth. Other communities have chosen to design their own approaches, including the City of Rossland,

the District of Ucluelet, and the City of Quesnel, which is focusing on the possibility of developing a 'green economy.'

**Implementation**, the final phase, moves communities from ideas to action, and ensures that outcomes remain relevant and fresh over time. To that end, a number of BC communities are developing tools such as indicators and sustainability checklists to ensure timely and consistent decision-making.

## OVERALL PROGRAM DELIVERY

In BC, the GTF is administered by the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM). While ICS planning was first introduced to local governments through the GTF, the term and practices have been adopted by the private sector and have taken on a variety of meanings depending on who's talking about them. Local governments in BC using gas tax funds to undertake their projects are advised to follow the guidelines set out in the program administered by UBCM.

The provincial initiative also involves the Ministry of Community Services (MCS) — which supports local governments through its Smart Planning Initiative. The initiative builds local governments' and First Nations' capacity to engage in innovative planning processes that incorporate sustainability principles and that use integrated decision-making throughout. Its key capacity-building components are currently under development, and will include:

- **First-stop website** to link local and First Nations' governments to the resources they need to do sustainability planning
- **Sustainability facilitators** located throughout BC and supported by leading-edge sustainability practitioners and experts
- **Information-sharing and resource network** to develop and expand linkages among sustainability experts, resources, and communities.

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Significant resources are available to help local governments engage in ICS planning. Through the GTA, five percent (approximately \$5 million) of the 2005-2010 pooled funds have been reserved for ICS planning for local governments outside Metro Vancouver. Pooled funds include the Strategic Priorities Funds (SPF) and Innovations Funds (IF). GTA Community Works Funds can also be used for ICS planning. Information about GTA funding including a program guide and application forms can be found on the UBCM website (Programs and Services/Gas Tax - Public Transit).

There are two application phases for ICSP funding through the GTA. The second intake of applications was received for ICSP projects up until April 30, 2008.

There are a number of sources of funding for ICS planning beyond the GTA. The MCS is committed to contributing funding for GVRD ICS planning projects. MCS is also supporting other ICS planning pilot projects through the Smart Development Partnership Program. The Real Estate Foundation is interested in supporting ICS projects through its Communities in Transition Program. Other government and private-sector sources of funding for ICS planning are being explored as well.

## IMPORTANT LINKS

Sustainable Community Development: <http://crcresearch.royalroads.ca/>

UBCM website (GTA Program Information and Guide): [www.civicnet.bc.ca](http://www.civicnet.bc.ca)

Real Estate Foundation Community in Transition Program: <http://www.communitytransition.org/>

Green City Awards: <http://www.greencityawards.gov.bc.ca/>

Natural Step Canada: <http://www.naturalstep.ca/>

Smart Growth BC: <http://www.smartgrowth.bc.ca/>

Smart Growth on the Ground: <http://www.sgog.bc.ca/>

ICLEI (International Clearinghouse on Sustainable Development): <http://www.iclei.org/>

SFU CSCD (Centre of Sustainable Community Development): <http://www.sfu.ca/cscd/>

UBC Design Centre for Sustainability: <http://www.dcs.sala.ubc.ca/>

ICSC (International Centre for Sustainable Cities): <http://www.icsc.ca/>

Pembina Institute: <http://www.pembina.org/sustainability-measurement/index.php>

West Coast Environmental Law: <http://www.wcel.org/>

FCM Centre for Sustainable Community Development: <http://kn.fcm.ca/>

The Centre for Whole Communities: <http://www.wholecommunities.org/>

The UN international Awards for Sustainability: <http://www.livcomawards.com/>

Fraser Basin Council: <http://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/>

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