

Highlands Sustainability Task Force

Final Report

Synopsis

January 2010

Executive Summary

The final report of the Highlands Sustainability Task Force (STF) presented a set of recommendations to help move the community towards a sustainable future, and a road map to help guide sequencing of these recommendations. This synopsis is meant as a brief overview of these recommendations and road map to use as a reference to index the full report.

Sustainability Topics

Recommendations were grouped by a set of key topics forming a section in the final report, each with a lead representative. The topics (sections) and leader contact emails are as follows:

1. General (A. Fall, andrew@gowlland.ca)
2. Climate change mitigation (greenhouse gas emissions) and energy (A. Fall, andrew@gowlland.ca)
3. Climate change adaptation (W. Lee, wglee@telus.net)
4. Transportation (B. Flitton, bflitton@shaw.ca)
5. Sustainable building (A. Baird, ann@eco-sense.ca)
6. Energy and resource use and conservation (G. Nuk, gregnuk@gmail.com)
7. Water management (E. Bonham, ebonham@shaw.ca)
8. Ecological conservation and green space connectivity (D. Mackas, DaveMackas@shaw.ca)
9. Local food production (B. McMinn, bobmcminn@shaw.ca)
10. Affordable housing and demographics (B. McMinn, bobmcminn@shaw.ca)
11. Sustainability appraisal form (A. Fall, andrew@gowlland.ca)
12. Social sustainability, communication and education (E. Bonham, ebonham@shaw.ca)

Roadmap to Prioritizing Recommendations

The task force recognizes the time and resource limitations of council and staff. To help, we aimed to be parsimonious, sufficiently concrete and structured. Recommendations followed a common format.

To provide some structure and guidance to council and staff, the task force classified recommendations using two dimensions: *significance of potential impacts*, and *difficulty of implementation*. ‘Higher/lower significance’ and ‘easier/harder to implement’ attributes are relative terms. Difficulty to implement generally focuses on the effort, resources and time required to initiate a recommendation that will evolve over time.

This led to four key groups of recommendations (Appendix 3 in the final report):

-  high significance / hard to implement (‘big tick items’; upper right)
-  high significance / easy to implement (‘low hanging fruit’; upper left)
-  lower significance / easy to implement (lower left)
-  lower significance / hard to implement (lower right)

The recommendations within each group were prioritized into 4 ‘steps’ to suggest a ‘road map’, shown on the following page. Icons indicate the classification group from which recommendations were taken (as indicated above).

The goal of the roadmap is to help focus energy towards action on a limited set of recommendations at a time and to help council, staff and the community avoid becoming overwhelmed. As recommendations within a group are completed for a step, others from subsequent steps can be considered.

The roadmap could be periodically updated as progress is made (e.g. in strategic planning sessions) and as further recommendations are developed.

Sustainability Recommendations Roadmap

Step 1



- #9 – Improve public transportation, park/rides, carpooling
- #38 – Develop a sustainability communication and education strategy



- #2 – Adopt a Highlands Sustainability Vision
- #1 – Incorporate Sustainability throughout the decision process
- #37 – Adopt and utilize Sustainability Appraisal Form
- #7 – Initiate ongoing dialogue on transportation
- #3 – Quantify and report GHG emissions



- #17 – Support BC Carbon Tax
- #5 – Reduce GHG emissions in municipal operations
- #39 – Create 'Sustainability' section in Highlands newsletter
- #20 – Implement a water/energy household self audit program

Step 2



- #8 – Improve non-motorized corridors
- #4 – Consider GHG emissions in decisions
- #13 – Explore incentives for energy/water upgrades



- #6 – Acknowledge risk of dependence on fossil fuel and cheap oil
- #40 – Create a 'Sustainability' section on Highlands website
- #41 – Engage existing networks in community
- #22 – Build community water education strategy
- #14 – Adopt a no net increase policy for water/energy use



- #35 – Create Local Food Production Task Force
- #19 – Create "Consumption Status Quo" brochure
- #12 – Adopt "flush toilet ready" building policy
- #30 – Enact a Highlands Food Charter
- #31 – Implement farm/forest friendly tax policies

Step 3



- #18 – Catalyze Sustainable Neighborhoods Project
- #21 – Create Highlands Water Smart program
- #26 – Use dynamic groundwater forecasting



- #15 – Use LICs to finance energy technology installations
- #23 – Promote rainwater harvest, xeriscaping, efficient irrigation
- #42 – Engage external organizations / networks
- #27 – Protect/restore Coastal Douglas-Fir ecological zone
- #24 – Manage storm water as a resource
- #28 – Catalyze a region-scale analysis of green space connectivity



- #16 – Initiate a Mayor's Eco-Challenge
- #34 – Promote local meat production friendly regulations
- #10 – Adopt Near Zero Emission Vehicles policy

Step 4



- #11 – Create new Net Zero Zones
- #25 – Adapt to changes in precipitation from climate change
- #32 – Ensure access to water for food production
- #36 – Set a goal to obtain land for affordable housing



- #29 – Minimize barrier/corridor effects of infrastructure
- #33 – Control invasive species on municipal land

Endorsed Recommendations

For reference, below are the *operative* portions of the recommendations. See the final report for background details and implementation guidance.

1. General

Recommendation 1: Incorporate sustainability throughout the decision process
Sustainability, in the context of the Highlands municipality and community, is defined as meeting the needs of the present community without compromising the ability of future generations to meet the same needs, and without degrading the functioning of local to global ecosystems as a result of resource use within the Highlands.

The STF recommends that council adopt the above definition of sustainability and communicate this to staff, advisory committees and task forces.

The STF further recommends that council commit to considering sustainability aspects of every major decision and encourage staff, advisory committees and task forces to consider sustainability aspects of their decisions, operations and recommendations.

Recommendation 2: Adopt a vision for a sustainable rural Highlands community

The STF recommends that council adopt a goal of reducing needs for motorized transportation in all policy and land use decisions in order to support and strengthen a rural Highlands community.

The STF further recommends that council, the Community Centre Task Force, the Highlands District Community Association and the Highlands Stewardship Foundation adopt a goal of promoting opportunities for social interactions for residents, with a particular focus on a community centre.

2. Climate change mitigation (greenhouse gas emissions) and energy

Recommendation 3: Quantify and report GHG emissions

The STF recommends that council adopt the Community Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory estimates produced by the province and Hyla Environmental Services as our 2007 base scenario, and coordinate with this service and the CRD for future updates to estimates as policies and changes get implemented.

Recommendation 4: Consider GHG emissions in decisions

The STF recommends that council adopt a policy to explicitly include greenhouse gas implications on major decisions and request staff to include assessments of greenhouse gas implications in background information for major issues.

Recommendation 5: Reduce GHG emissions in municipal operations

The STF recommends that council adopt a policy of monitoring GHG emissions in municipal operations, with a particular focus on decisions that change emission levels, and commit to reducing emissions over time.

Recommendation 6: Acknowledge risk of dependence on fossil fuel and cheap oil

The STF recommends that council acknowledge the risks posed by the end of cheap oil, commit to include energy issues in sustainability considerations, and aim towards reducing fossil fuel dependence.

The STF further recommends that District of Highlands request the Capital Regional District to either establish an Energy Vulnerability Task Force or to enable an existing body (e.g. Roundtable on the Environment) to produce background information, recommendations and funding needs on vulnerabilities and opportunities regarding energy reduction and production in the Capital Region regarding, but not limited to, educating the public, land use and transportation policies, energy efficiency programs, potential for alternative energy, food production capacity, supporting sustainable economic development, strengthening social and economic support systems, and preparing for energy emergencies.

3. Climate change adaptation – integrated with other topic areas

4. Transportation

Recommendation 7: Initiate ongoing dialog on transportation

The STF recommends that council establish a mandate for the Community Infrastructure and Services Select Committee to discuss and make ongoing recommendations regarding transport options to reduce car use.

Recommendation 8: Improve pedestrian and non-motorized corridors

The STF recommends that council prioritize a multi-use trail near Millstream Road from Caleb Pike House to the border with Langford, preferably away from the road, the primary purpose of which is to provide non-motorized commuting alternatives.

Recommendation 9: Improve public transportation, park & rides, and carpooling

The STF recommends that council write a letter to BC Transit to communicate the importance of shuttle service in the Highlands. If and when a community centre is established, that council further write to BC Transit communicating the importance of a transit connection adjacent to the centre.

The STF further recommends that council identify and establish potential park and ride locations near shuttle stops, to support diversified links to urban centres.

The STF further recommends that council work with the HDCA and other community organizations to promote carpooling and to designate a central place where people can meet for carpooling near an existing shuttle stop, provide residents with information on the benefits of carpooling, and explore methods to help facilitate carpooling and communication (e.g. online scheduling, car-stop program).

Recommendation 10: Adopt the Near Zero Emission Vehicles (NZEV) Policy

The STF recommends that council adopt the CRD NZEV bylaw and designate appropriate roads with speeds of 40 km/h or lower as NZEV roads, and consider establishing other key connector roads under the bylaw where roads or transportation corridors may be designed to safely facilitate such vehicles, such as Munn Road, Finlayson Arm Road, Caleb Pike Road and Millstream Road,

5. Sustainable building

Recommendation 11: Create new Net Zero zones (net zero energy, water and waste)

The STF recommends that council endorse the creation of new *NET ZERO* zoning that encourages mixed land use, increased density, and protective covenants to achieve truly sustainable buildings and lifestyles.

Recommendation 12: Adopt ‘flush toilet ready’¹ and other green building policies

The STF recommends the adoption of a flush toilet ready policy and other green building policies that can be demonstrated to meet the functions and safety objectives of the building code while protecting the interests of future owners.

Recommendation 13: Explore incentives for energy and water home upgrades

The STF recommends that council explore the feasibility of creating a grant or incentive program to encourage individual water and energy upgrades for existing homes.

Further, the STF recommends that council adopt a green building standard to provide an objective basis for measuring changes to existing houses.

Further the STF recommends that council explore the feasibility that all new construction (including renovations) pays a carbon tax offset to the community to be used to achieve carbon reductions in other areas within the community.

Recommendation 14: Adopt a no net increase policy for water and energy use

The STF recommends that the Highlands adopt a vision of no net increase in community water use and reduced per capita energy use.

¹ “Flush toilet ready” refers a home with an engineered, but not constructed septic system, and with installed plumbing, but not an installed flush toilet.

6. Energy and resource use and conservation

Recommendation 15: Use local improvement charges to finance energy technology installations

The STF recommends that council create the ability to levy a Local Improvement Charge (LIC) line item on municipal taxes that would allow financial institutions to pay for the high upfront cost of energy efficiency or alternative energy technology installation and to recover this cost over a long period of time through annual repayments that stay attached to the home.

Recommendation 16: Initiate a Mayor's eco-challenge

The STF recommends that the Mayor issue an Eco-Challenge to neighbouring Victoria municipalities.

Recommendation 17: Support the BC carbon tax

The STF recommends that council write a letter of support for the BC Carbon Tax to the Premier and relevant Ministers and attempt to get other greater Victoria municipalities to write similar letters.

Recommendation 18: Catalyze a Sustainable Neighbourhoods Project

The STF recommends that council request the Highlands District Community Association to lead and embark on a 'Sustainable Neighbourhoods Project'.

Recommendation 19: Create a 'Consumption Status Quo' brochure

The STF recommends that council commission a small brochure, book, or pamphlet that focuses on 'Challenging our Consumption Status Quo' and distribute it to all Highland residents.

7. Water management

Recommendation 20: Implement a water/energy household self-audit program

The STF recommends council endorse implementing a water/energy household self-audit program that provides relevant information to the homeowner to enable the adoption of effective conservation measures.

Recommendation 21: Create a Highlands Water Smart incentive program

The STF recommends that council initiate the creation of a Highlands Water Smart program that includes implementing and promoting dual flush toilets, composting toilets, showerhead retrofits, and installation of efficient appliances.

Recommendation 22: Build a community water education strategy

The STF recommends that council endorse information exchange and collaboration on a range of water related issues with community groups such as HDCA and HSF, and Eco-Sense on the delivery of educational programs.

Recommendation 23: Promote rainwater harvest, xeriscaping and efficient irrigation

The STF recommends that council encourage rainwater harvesting, xeriscaping with native plants and the adoption of efficient irrigation practices.

Recommendation 24: Manage storm water as a resource

The STF recommends that storm water and surface runoff is managed such that impervious paved areas are reduced, and that storm water where possible is treated at source and returned to ground, both of which result in reduced flooding and augmentation of the aquifer and surface streams. Low Impact Development (LID) is to be encouraged throughout the planning and construction phase of development.

Recommendation 25: Adapt to changes in precipitation due to climate change

The STF recommends that council make land use decisions based on changes in, and projections of, aquifer levels, snow loads, extreme rain and droughts, as appropriate for Highlands, and revise snow load requirements, road drainage, and locally-adapted fire smart guidelines as needed.

Recommendation 26: Use dynamic groundwater forecasting

The STF recommends that council request the ground water task force to explore the use of a dynamic groundwater forecasting tool.

8. Ecological conservation and green space connectivity

Recommendation 27: Protect/restore natural habitat representative of the Coastal Douglas-Fir ecological zone

The STF recommends that council adopt ‘protection and restoration of representative Coastal Douglas-Fir habitat’ as a key objective for existing and new zoning, development permit, tax incentive, and land acquisition decisions.

Recommendation 28: Catalyze a region-scale analysis of green space connectivity

The STF recommends that council propose to CRD a region-scale analysis of the requirements, opportunities, and obstacles for good ecological connectivity.

Recommendation 29: Minimize adverse barrier and corridor effects of infrastructure

The STF recommends that council include ecological connectivity in the design and maintenance of roadways and power line corridors

9. Local food production

Recommendation 30: Enact a Highlands Food Charter

The STF recommends that council enact a ‘Highland Food Charter’ to promote local food production.

Recommendation 31: Implement farm- and forest-friendly tax policies

The STF recommends that council enact farm- and forest-friendly policies to support continuation of these land uses.

Recommendation 32: Ensure access to water for food production

The STF recommends that council ensure that water for food production, in addition to ensuring water for residential use, is a District priority

Recommendation 33: Control invasive species on municipal land

The STF recommends that council establish an annual program to control noxious weeds on municipal lands

Recommendation 34: Promote local meat production-friendly regulations

The STF recommends that council lobby the provincial government to enact local meat production-friendly regulations.

Recommendation 35: Create a volunteer Local Food Production Task Force

The STF recommends that council appoint a ‘Local Food Production’ task force.

10. Affordable housing and demographics

Recommendation 36: Set a goal to obtain land for affordable housing

The STF recommends that council set a goal of obtaining land for affordable housing, e.g. through amenity rezoning. Upon obtaining such land, the STF recommends that council establish a Highlands Housing Corporation with directors including volunteers, council and District staff members.

11. Sustainability Appraisal Form

Recommendation 37: Adopt and utilize a sustainability appraisal form

The STF recommends that council revise and adopt the attached sustainability appraisal form (appendix 2) to encourage community sustainability objectives in new development and buildings, and request its completion for significant projects by proponents, as well as council, to ensure sustainability objectives are explicitly considered.

12. Social sustainability, communication and education

Recommendation 38: Develop a sustainability communication and education strategy

The STF recommends that council endorse and initiate the creation of a Sustainability Communications, Engagement and Education Strategy utilizing a range of resources and methods that is both inclusive and practical.

Recommendation 39: Include a ‘Sustainability’ section in Highlands newsletter

The STF recommends that council pass a motion to add a dedicated Sustainability section to the monthly Highlands newsletter.

Recommendation 40: Create a ‘Sustainability’ section on Highlands website

The STF recommends that council construct a ‘Sustainability’ page on the Highlands website that will make it easier for residents to educate themselves on available clean technologies, and to share success stories, local experience and lessons learned.

Recommendation 41: Engage existing networks within the community

The STF recommends council collaborate with committees and community groups such as the Fiscal and Environment Select Committee, the Community Infrastructure and Services Select Committee, Highland District Community Association, Neighbourhood Groups, the Highlands Stewardship Foundation, the Highlands Fire Department, and the Garden Club to articulate the concept of sustainability within the context of the definition developed by the STF.

Recommendation 42: Engage external organizations and develop networks

The STF recommends that the District of Highlands participate in an outreach program that connects with other communities and agencies in the region similarly engaged in sustainability planning.