

Evaluating implementation: The Integrated Community Sustainability Plan Shelburne, Nova Scotia

Brian Zurek

Plan 6000

December 2009

Municipalities across Canada face increasing challenges to maintain essential services and infrastructures without matching increases in resources or capacities. Local governments struggle to replace aging infrastructure, limit urban sprawl, offset rising energy costs, and adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Recognizing these challenges, in 2005 the federal and provincial governments developed a national program to fund municipal investments in sustainable infrastructure. To qualify for funding, each municipality must create an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP). These plans require local governments to consider infrastructure development in the context of their community's long-term economic, environmental, and social needs.

Literature shows that developing plans does not, however, result in plan implementation. Without successfully implementing sustainability plans, local governments limit their capacity to improve their decision-making processes and break from the cycle of short-term reactionary management.

This holds true for many rural Nova Scotia communities in general, and in particular for the Town of Shelburne, Nova Scotia. Indeed, local population and economic decline further challenge the ability of the Town to reprioritize short- and long-term decision-making. Recognizing Shelburne's need, this study developed decision-support tools to help the Town implement its ICSP.

Effective plan implementation strategies reviewed in the literature, priorities of Shelburne's ICSP, and analysis of the Town's plan implementation process informed the decision-support tools' development. The study developed two assessment tools to incorporate Shelburne's sustainability priorities into the municipal decision-making context. For use by Shelburne staff and council, the tools may evaluate capital projects and operating expenses, budget allocations, and other municipal initiatives.

Implementing Shelburne's ICSP requires that the Town adopt sustainability principles into its municipal decision-making processes. Use of the decision-support tools can, in part, contribute to Shelburne's evolving culture of sustainability.