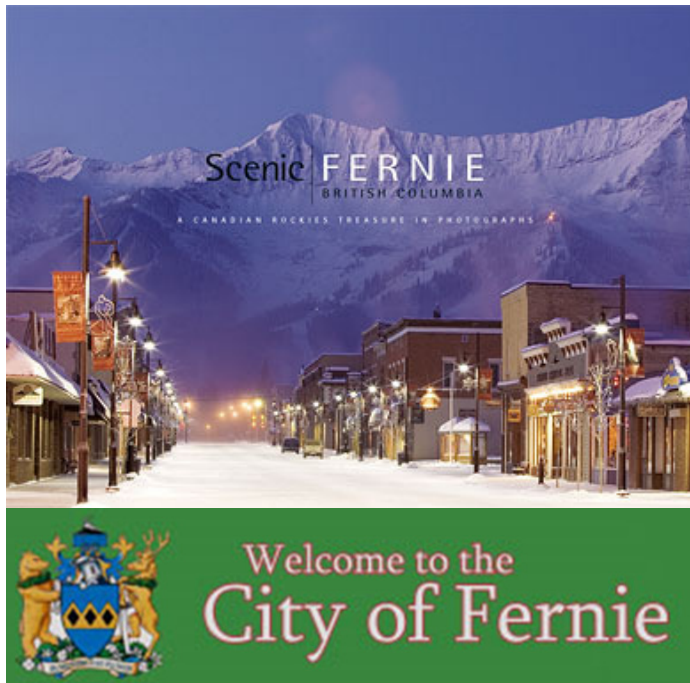


# CENTRE *for* SUSTAINABILITY

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*Creating the future **today.***

## Fernie's Integrated Community Sustainability Plan Process



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# Integrated Community Sustainability Plan

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## Integrated Community Sustainability Plan

### Process Description

#### *Introduction and Context*

Creating a community sustainability vision, plan, and implementation strategy is, in effect, creating a strategic plan for your community that addresses economic, social and environmental goals. Creating a plan for a more sustainable and successful community may be one of the most important public engagement initiatives undertaken by a local government. This plan will guide all future plans and investments made in the community, and ensure that all decisions in the future are aligned with the community's vision and goals.

#### **What is an ICSP?**

An Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) is a high-level strategic document that is written by the community, informed by sustainability principles, and guides the community into the future. It identifies strategies and short, medium, and long-term actions for implementation, tracks and monitors progress, and is reviewed on an annual basis. An ICSP is a big picture, holistic plan that provides guidance for the development or alignment of all municipal or government plans, policies and decisions (i.e., Official Community Plan, Transportation Plan, municipal development plan, energy plans, purchasing policies, capital planning, etc.) under one integrated decision-making framework. An ICSP is an integrated planning approach and process. Since sustainability problems are often complex and overlapping, they cannot be solved in isolation, and are best addressed using a comprehensive, systems-based approach that addresses the root of the problem, rather than only the symptoms. For example, toxic effluent in rivers affects fish health (environmental), which affects people (social) and financial prosperity (economic). All of these elements and their connections must be considered to arrive at effective solutions.

An ICSP is as much a process as it is a plan. The end result is more than a document: it is in fact an on-going process of engaging stakeholders in the community in co-creating and updating a vision of a sustainable future and linking that to realistic planning and collaborative action today. ICSPs emphasize long-term thinking, collaboration between departments and between sectors, engaging community stakeholders, creating partnerships, and continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Commitment to the development of an ICSP is also a formal requirement for the use of federal gas tax funding by a community, which is administered by UBCM. The Quick Start ICSP process had been designed to satisfy all of the UBCM's four required elements for an ICSP:

- **Long-term Thinking.** Local governments consider extending the planning horizon beyond the normal 3-5 year planning timeframe.

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- **Broad in Scope.** Local governments consider the communities' environmental, economic, social and/or cultural sustainability.
- **Integration.** Local governments better co-ordinate their approach to community sustainability through linkages between different types of plans.
- **Collaboration.** Local governments engage the public and other partners in planning processes to support community sustainability.

### Keys to Success

Despite the important differences between communities regarding their institutions and infrastructures, the Whistler Centre for Sustainability, along with our network of community-based practitioners, have identified a number of “keys to success” that make it more likely that a community will be able to move effectively toward sustainability.

- An ICSP should be guided by a vision of a community in a sustainable society, and be created by all those whose actions it is meant to guide.
- At the heart of this sustainability planning approach is a commitment to a bottom-up participatory process that engages those affected by decisions and those who will be responsible for implementing parts of the plan. These stakeholders should include citizens, businesses, NGOs, First Nations and other organizations when they will have an important part to play in the process. Just as important is to design the process so that the time and energy that participants put into the project benefit both themselves and the wider community.
- The planning process should combine planning and action by implementing easy first actions (“low-hanging fruit”). Often these first actions are efficiency improvements that generate savings that can be invested in more challenging measures later. Sometimes it is even effective to begin implementing these actions while the planning process is still underway. This parallel action/planning process can create buy-in among a diverse group of stakeholders and increase their enthusiasm for the planning process.
- The approach to planning is holistic, systems-based, and integrated as opposed to addressing issues in a fragmented, case-by-case basis. This requires a focus on building capacity among the participants to see the planning process from a “big picture” perspective.
- Ongoing education and training programs, monitoring the effectiveness of actions with indicators, all guided by the vision and sustainability principles, help institutionalize change and keep adopted practices going over time. Planning should also be undertaken in cycles, in a long-term planning process.

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### *The “Quick Start” ICSP*

#### Overview

While a comprehensive integrated community sustainability plan (ICSP) with an OCP update and alignment is the ideal mechanism for advancing sustainability in any community, we understand that the resources required to undertake such an intensive process are beyond what many small to medium sized communities have available. Therefore, the Whistler Centre for Sustainability (“the Centre”), in partnership with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, is offering a “Quick Start” version of an ICSP that will get your community moving forward on your sustainability journey immediately and meaningfully, while preparing the groundwork for potentially more comprehensive sustainability planning and implementation. It is anticipated that, barring unforeseen circumstances, a Quick Start ICSP process should take approximately six months to complete.

#### Outcomes

At the completion of the Quick Start ICSP process, your community will have:

- A baseline sustainability plan outlining a vision, sustainability principles, and key priority strategy areas.
- A set of clear actions for immediate implementation, directed to specific organizations.
- An effective and easy-to-use monitoring and reporting system.
- Website content for communicating sustainability initiatives.
- A solid basis for pursuing more comprehensive sustainability planning and implementation, including an ICSP-based decision making framework.

### *The Quick Start ICSP Process*

The following process provides a framework for the development of a Quick Start ICSP. This process is modeled after Whistler2020, the community of Whistler’s community sustainability plan, as well as after organizations working on sustainability planning around the globe, including The Natural Step, and is focused on a ‘bottom-up participatory process’ that engages those affected by decisions and those who will be responsible for implementing parts of the plan.

- 1. Project kick-off** – The Centre meets with municipal staff to confirm project scope, deliverables, process and timeline. A Community Sustainability Action Team (CSAT) is identified and created to work with the Centre and municipal staff throughout the process.

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- 2. Reviewing existing documents and preparing a framework** – The Centre reviews all existing and relevant documents for sustainability visions, policies, and actions. Sustainability principles and a framework for the ICSP will be drafted. Background materials will be developed.
- 3. Creating a shared understanding of future sustainable community success** – The Centre then prepares and organizes a community event to gather input on the shared vision, sustainability principles, priority strategy areas, and descriptions of success, i.e., what is the desired outcome for the community in a future year for these strategies. Sustainability education/training support and coaching will also be provided.
- 4. Review and confirm Descriptions of Success** - The Centre takes the input from the community and works with the CSAT to review and finalize the vision, principles, priority strategy areas and Descriptions of Success (DoS).
- 5. Descriptions of Current Reality** – The Centre, with assistance from the municipality, then develops the Descriptions of Current Reality (DoCR), which are statements and data indicating the current state of the community in the identified priority strategy areas.
- 6. Action planning** – The CSAT, with support from the Centre, then meets to review the current reality and descriptions of success, and then brainstorms a series of initiatives and any required investments in each strategy. For example, it may be agreed upon that “affordable housing” is a priority strategy area. In this case, the community describes the characteristics of their community’s desired future to include affordable housing if they achieved their sustainability vision and then describe the current reality of the affordable housing situation in their community at the current time. This connection between current reality and the desired future will aid in generating ideas for initiatives and investments, the ‘actions’ to “bridge the gap” between the current reality, and the desired future. Actions could be decided upon according to a filter including criteria such as ease of implementation and sustainability impact. At this stage community partner organizations could take responsibility for certain initiatives, either by leading or supporting implementation.
- 7. Performance monitoring and reporting** – The Centre compiles a list of performance measures according to the priority strategy areas and defined descriptions of success, and CSAT and municipal staff provide input. The Centre creates a basic monitoring and reporting tool, which is Excel based and easy to use for data input and report generation or web site use.
- 8. Finalizing the ICSP** – The Centre then finalizes the Community Sustainability Plan, including the vision, sustainability principles, priority strategy areas, descriptions of success and indicators. Attached to the ICSP will be the Quick Start set of actions ready for

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implementation, and a basic tool for tracking action implementation.

**9. Decision-making framework** – The Centre provides the municipality with a corporate sustainability decision-making framework that incorporates the community sustainability principles and descriptions of success. For example, questions that could be included in a decision-making framework could look like:

- Do the initiatives or investment move the community towards its shared vision?
- Does the action move the community towards its sustainability objectives?
- Does the action present a flexible platform for further progress towards sustainability?
- Is the investment a good financial investment?

**10. Presentation to Council and the Community** – The Centre will work with municipal staff in preparing a presentation to Council and the Community on the final ICSP priorities, strategy areas, and actions, and how these are applied. A workshop for Council, staff, and potentially other community stakeholders on the ICSP sustainability framework and implementation is also recommended.

### ***Post Quick Start ICSP***

The Quick Start ICSP process is an effective and timely way of initiating a long-lasting sustainability planning process in the community. The creation of the plan is the starting point and solid foundation for future steps along the community's sustainability journey. Ongoing action identification and implementation, monitoring and reporting, and continued integration into corporate plans, policies, projects, and practices is essential for the success of your sustainability planning efforts.