



COMMUNITY ENERGY PLANNING: *Critical Actions for Success*

by Ron Macdonald and Siobhan Murphy

Climate change is expected to impact every aspect of our lives, from the way we travel, to what we eat, and how we function day-to-day. Many communities across Canada are developing Community Energy Plans (CEP) in response to climate change and energy security concerns. A CEP provides communities with a local action plan to affect change at the operational level. Each Canadian community is unique and has different needs based on its size, location and resources, yet many CEPs contain common elements. Successful plans – those that have engaged the community and are achieving ongoing political and community support for implementation

– share certain key components, and these are detailed here.

Develop a vision and clear objectives

Developing a vision provides the building block on which a CEP can stand. It establishes how the community sees itself in the future and what the key objectives are that the community wants to achieve. If there is no vision, it can be challenging to map out the “destination”. For example, in Saskatoon, the community developed a vision for their plan emphasizing leadership in renewable energy and energy conservation (see next page). This vision statement

Summary

Many communities across Canada are developing Community Energy Plans (CEP) to address climate change and energy security concerns. A CEP provides a community with a local action plan that affects change at the operational level. And while each Canadian community is unique and has different needs based on size, location and resources, many CEPs contain common elements.

Résumé

Plusieurs collectivités canadiennes élaborent des plans énergétiques communautaires (PEC) afin de s'attaquer aux changements climatiques et au problème de la sécurité de l'approvisionnement en énergie. Un PEC dote la collectivité d'un plan d'action local qui génère des changements au niveau opérationnel. Même si chaque collectivité canadienne a ses besoins propres fondés sur la taille de son territoire, sa situation et ses ressources, beaucoup de PEC partagent des éléments communs.

became the foundation for the goals, strategies, and actions of the plan.

Objectives – or broader goals – can be defined by council or a consultation process, but provide direction to the plan. For example, is the objective of the plan to “reduce greenhouse gas emissions”, to “reduce all energy consumption”, to “develop renewable energy supplies” or to “ensure reliable electricity provision”? These goals, developed in concert with the vision, provide clarity during implementation when trade-offs become apparent and prioritization of actions is evaluated.

“Our vision is to become a leader in renewable energy, energy conservation and management of greenhouse gas emissions.”

(City of Saskatoon CEP)

Identify local champions

Success is linked to support from local champions. For a CEP, success will increase if there is both a staff champion and a political champion. A *staff champion* provides the internal support that creates opportunities with existing and parallel initiatives, as well as acting as a resource for council. A *council champion* provides political support in council for the CEP and promotes it in the community. For example, in Whistler, one of the staff champions for the CEP was Brian Barnett, General Manager of Development Services & Environmental Projects. According to Brent Moore of BC’s Ministry of Environment who also worked on the project, Barnett’s unwavering support was integral to the plan’s success. “To me, that level of commitment defines a champion, and enables them to stay the course in a long process,” said Moore.

Ensure staff buy-in

Input from staff is invaluable when creating a plan because it is staff who know the community and who will be responsible for implementing the plan. When there is staff buy-in to a plan at the outset, ongoing support for the plan and its initiatives is most likely. The nuts and bolts of implementing a CEP will include programs, policies and incentives that will need to be created and

administered by municipal staff. Staff involvement from the beginning will add value to the development and implementation of policies and programs, and contribute to the plan’s likelihood of successful implementation.

Recognize – and work within – your spheres of influence

It’s important to create understanding amongst both staff and community residents concerning the municipality’s sphere of influence and what their community can do to effect change. For example, community members may focus on transit issues as an area in which they want to change behaviour, but this is not within the sphere of influence of some municipalities (e.g., within a regional transportation network). However, programs that are within a municipality’s sphere of influence to effect change can be developed – for example, those that promote the health benefits of alternative transportation modes or carpooling. For this reason, many municipalities start their energy planning activities with their own municipal operations (called a corporate plan), where they can focus on consumption that they can control (e.g., fleet operations, municipal buildings, street lighting, recreational facilities).

Develop partnerships for implementation

Developing partnerships and capturing available resources can significantly affect the ease with which a CEP can be

implemented. The Federal government, and many energy utilities and provincial governments have funding that communities can make use of. As a start, the municipality can devote its efforts to getting the community to maximize benefits from these initiatives. After these have been fully taken up, the municipality could then consider developing a new initiative.

Don’t reinvent the wheel

Most CEPS include energy reductions through improved building performance. These are often based on industry or governmental certification systems (e.g. LEED™, Built Green™, EnergyStar). Using established standards and certifications will encourage measurement that is consistent and prevents confusion in the market place.

“Bring in the community”

Including a consultation component into a CEP brings the community into the process, which creates broader support for the plan. As a result, community members are able to contribute their values, which can be reflected in the vision, as well as contributing valuable local knowledge. It is also important to connect with the development sector early as a targeted group, as this is a huge opportunity to work together to make energy-efficient changes during the development process, and work together on initiatives for retro-fitting existing development.



Developing a vision and plan at a forum in Saskatoon.

Keep the momentum going – it's a long haul

Planning processes take time, and keeping staff, council and the community committed to a project can be challenging. Funding needs to be allocated, community input needs to be gathered, and technical information needs to be collected before a plan is developed that reflects where the community is (baseline), where it wants to go (vision), and how they are going to get there (programs and initiatives). As well, the implementation of the plan may have short-, medium- and long-term initiatives. For example, a CEP in the community of Revelstoke, BC, was completed in 1997. The plan recommended the development of a district energy system, which wasn't completed until 2004.

In Prince George, the community has been working for five to seven years on a district energy system before they had a comprehensive plan. Funding for a CEP for Prince George was announced in January 2007, and will be commencing this year.

The fourth assessment report from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that warming of the climate is now unequivocal due to increases in global air and ocean temperatures, melting snow and ice, and rising sea levels. It has been estimated that in Canada up to 50% of GHG emissions occur within municipal boundaries or within some degree of influence of municipal governments. Slowing the rate of climate change will require humans to conserve energy and reduce GHG emissions, and municipalities have a role in finding solutions. The development of community energy plans is an opportunity for municipalities to contribute at the local level by developing actions and programs to affect this trend. If communities do not make efforts to conserve energy and reduce emissions, climate change will continue apace and is predicted to increase in intensity and variability. ■



Wind turbines.
Photo credit: Chantal Laliberté

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