Background

Governments at all levels have a key role in moving towards sustainability, as they are responsible for setting the vision and associated goals for an area as well as establishing and implementing policy, within their scope of influence, to achieve the vision and goals within their jurisdictions.

The term ‘sustainability’ has been defined many different ways\(^1\). Nonetheless, the various definitions of ‘sustainability’ all appear to recognize that humans have an impact on the earth and that humans should try to ensure that what we do today does not erode our economic, environmental and social capital, so that future generations can meet their own needs. Sustainability is the concept that humans are part of the ecosystem, and that there is a need to integrate the economic and social lives of humans into the environment in ways that maintain and enhance the environment rather than degrade or destroy it.

In the early 1990’s the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) recognized its responsibility to work towards sustainability, and embarked on a process to develop a regional strategy to manage the impacts of population growth and development on a regional basis within its scope of influence. A regional strategy was deemed appropriate in recognition of the fact that the impacts of growth span the jurisdictional boundaries of individual municipalities and electoral areas, and the fact that while it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for local governments to stop population growth, it is possible for local governments to mitigate the impacts of population growth through the development and implementation of long range plans and strategies. The project resulted in the adoption of a regional growth strategy for the region in 1997, based on the principles

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\(^1\) Examples of some of the various definitions of sustainability are:

- “Sustainable development requires environmental health, economic prosperity and social equity” *Earth Council:*
- “Sustainable development involves the simultaneous pursuit of economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity. Companies aiming for sustainability need to perform not against a single, financial bottom line but against a triple bottom line” *The World Business Council for Sustainable Development*
- “Sustainable development means implementing a process that integrates environmental, economic, and social considerations into decision making” *Environment Canada*
- “Development which ensures that the utilization of resources and the environment today does not damage prospects for their use by future generations” *Canada’s National Task Force on Environment and Economy*
- “Living on earth’s income rather than eroding its capital. It means keeping consumption of renewable natural resources within the limits of their replenishment. It means handing down to successive generations not only man-made wealth, but also natural wealth, such as clean and adequate water supplies, good arable land, a wealth of wildlife, and ample forests.” *United Kingdom’s Sustainable Development Strategy*
- “Development that meets the needs of the present generation without precluding the possibility of future generations to meet their own needs” *Bruntland Report, Our Common Future*
- “Improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystem” *Caring for the Earth*
- “A community is unsustainable if it consumes resources faster than they can be renewed, produces more wastes than natural systems can process or relies upon distant sources for its basic needs” *Sustainable Community Roundtable.*

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of sustainability. In essence, the goals of the RDN’s regional growth strategy establish the foundation of the RDN’s definition of sustainability for the region. The goals of the regional growth strategy are:

1. **Strong Urban Containment**: To limit sprawl and focus development within well defined urban containment boundaries.
2. **Nodal Structure**: To encourage mixed-use development that includes places to live, work, learn, play, shop and access services.
3. **Rural Integrity**: To protect and strengthen the region’s rural economy and lifestyle.
4. **Environmental Protection**: To protect the environment and minimize ecological damage related to growth and development.
5. **Improved Mobility**: To improve and diversify mobility options within the region – increasing transportation efficiency and reducing dependency on the automobile.
6. **Vibrant and Sustainable Economy**: To support strategic economic development that respects the rural and environmental protection priorities of the region.
7. **Efficient Services**: To provide cost efficient services and infrastructure where urban development is intended, and to provide services in other areas where the service is needed to address environmental or public health issues and the provision of the service will not result in additional development.
8. **Cooperation Among Jurisdictions**: To facilitate and understanding or and commitment to the goals of growth management among all levels of government, the public, and key private and voluntary sector partners.

In short, the regional growth strategy aims to establish a more sustainable pattern of population growth and development in the region over a twenty-five year period by encouraging and directing most new development in the region in designated urban areas, thereby keeping urban settlement compact, protecting the integrity of rural and resource areas, protecting the environment, increasing servicing efficiency, and retaining mobility within the region.

The **Local Government Act** requires regional districts that have adopted regional growth strategies to establish a program to monitor its implementation and the progress made towards its objectives and actions, and to prepare an annual report on that implementation and progress. Consequently, the RDN initiated the development of such a program after it first adopted a regional growth strategy in 1997. The monitoring program has evolved since that time. The initial monitoring report, published in 1997, was an administrative document that described key projects completed to implement the regional growth strategy. In 1998 and 1999 more detailed reports were prepared with a citizen committee. The 1998 and 1999 reports provided information regarding compliance with each of the policies of the regional growth strategy based primarily on qualitative data. One-time project funding was provided in 2000 to develop a set of indicators (or measures) of regional growth strategy vision and goal attainment (see Appendix 1) and to obtain the baseline data for the chosen indicators. The first report based on the data for these indicators was developed in conjunction with a citizen committee and received by the RDN Board in April of 2001. In April of 2002, the RDN Board directed staff to develop the next steps for the monitoring program and terms of reference for an associated citizen committee, with the view to providing a wider range of opportunities for public involvement in the program. The State of Sustainability Project has been designed to satisfy these objectives.

**Purpose**

The purposes of the State of Sustainability Project are:

- ✓ to assess the region’s progress towards sustainability, primarily using the existing indicator set (see Appendix 1),
- ✓ to make residents aware of the region’s progress towards sustainability, and
- ✓ to provide more and better opportunities to involve residents of the region in the assessment.
Components and Deliverables

1. A public event to discuss what sustainability means in the context of the Nanaimo region, and a report that documents the findings of the event.

2. Review the existing indicator set (see Appendix 1), make minor refinements to it as necessary, and reaffirm it, for use in the development of the report that documents the state of sustainability of the Nanaimo region.

3. A report that documents the state of sustainability of the Nanaimo region, based on selected indicators of sustainability.

4. A public event to discuss the results of the report that documents the state of sustainability of the Nanaimo region, and a report that documents the findings of the event.

5. A report that provides ideas about how the sustainability of the region can be improved.

6. The development and implementation of a Regional Sustainability Awards Program, to publicly recognize projects/organizations/individuals that have made a significant contribution to the sustainability of the region and to raise awareness about regional sustainability.

7. Citizen committee involvement in the above (i.e. approximately 12 meetings per year).

Roles and Responsibilities

Citizen Committee

1. Provide advice regarding public events (i.e. Who should be invited to attend? What speakers should be invited to speak at the event? How should the event be formatted? How should participant feedback about sustainability be obtained at the event? Where should the event be conducted? How should the event be publicized?).

2. Provide comments about the existing indicator set for use in refining the indicator set.

3. Review and provide comments about draft reports about:
   - the state of sustainability in the region;
   - how the sustainability of the region can be improved.

4. Provide advice regarding the development and implementation of the Regional Sustainability Awards Program.

5. Make recommendations regarding the awarding of Regional Sustainability Awards.

6. Attend public events.

7. Attend committee meetings. A maximum of twelve meetings may be conducted each year, concentrated around the development of key project deliverables.

Committee Chair

1. Provide guidance to staff in the development of committee meeting agendas.

2. Approve the minutes of Committee meetings.

3. Present reports to the Board.

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Staff

1. Research and write reports about:
   ▪ the existing indicator set and recommended refinements;
   ▪ the state of sustainability of the Nanaimo region;
   ▪ how the sustainability of the region can be improved;
   ▪ the public events.
   Staff will develop initial drafts of reports, circulate draft reports to the committees as referenced in the applicable sections for comments and discussion, and take the committees' comments into consideration in the finalization of the report.

2. Organize and facilitate public events.

3. Develop the Regional Sustainability Awards Program.

4. Report to the Regional Board about the Project.

5. Develop committee meetings agendas, under the guidance of the Committee Chair.

6. Prepare committee meeting minutes for the approval of the Committee Chair. The minutes will not be a verbatim record of all of the discussion at a meeting. The minutes will record the topics discussed at each meeting and the resolutions passed at each meeting.

7. Ensure that project budget is allocated according to Regional Board direction.

8. Circulate meeting agendas and meeting minutes to the committee.

9. Communicate with the media about reports and events, in consultation with the Committee Chair.

Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC)

1. Provide technical advice regarding indicators to be used in the development of reports about the state of sustainability of the Nanaimo region.

2. Provide data, where applicable, for the indicators and or identify other possible data sources for the indicators.

3. Review and provide technical comments about draft reports about:
   ▪ the state of sustainability of the region;
   ▪ how the sustainability of the region can be improved.

4. Attend public events, where possible.

Regional Board

1. Make decisions regarding the budget for the program.

2. Make decisions regarding reports (i.e. to receive, to take additional action, to change or adopt new RDN policies and regulations, etc.).

3. Make decisions regarding committee appointments.

4. Review and receive the minutes of committee meetings.

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5. Make decisions regarding the indicators to be used to develop reports about the state of sustainability of the Nanaimo region.

6. If targets are set for the indicators, make decisions regarding the targets for each indicator.

7. Make decisions regarding the presentation of awards for the Regional Sustainability Awards Program.

8. Attend a meeting of the citizen committee, if deemed appropriate, for the purpose of providing an additional opportunity for dialogue between the committee and the Regional Board regarding progress towards the regional growth strategy goals and a more sustainable region.

Regional Board Chair

1. Appoint one electoral area director and one member municipality director to the committee. One of the appointed directors is to be assigned responsibility to Chair the committee, and one of the appointed directors is to be assigned responsibility to be the Deputy Chair for the committee.

### Timeline

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Citizen committee orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2003 / Summer 2003 / Fall 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Preparation and planning for public event to discuss what sustainability means in the context of the Nanaimo region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2003 / Summer 2003 / Fall 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Conduct public event to discuss what sustainability means in the context of the Nanaimo region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Winter 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Review, refine and reaffirm indicator set</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spring 2004 / Summer 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Research, write and publish report that documents the state of sustainability in the Nanaimo region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fall 2004</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Develop regional sustainability awards program</td>
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<td>Winter 2005 / Spring 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Preparation and planning for public event to discuss results of the report that documents the state of sustainability of the Nanaimo region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Winter 2005 / Spring 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Conduct public event to discuss the results of the report that documents the state of sustainability in the Nanaimo region</td>
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<td>Spring 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Implement regional sustainability awards program</td>
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<td>Spring 2005</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Research, write and publish report that documents how the sustainability of the Nanaimo region can be improved</td>
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<td>Fall 2005</td>
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Note: Winter = Jan – March; Spring = March – June; Summer = June – Aug.; Fall = Sept. – Dec.
## Budget

The Project budget is allocated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public event to discuss what sustainability means in the context of the Nanaimo region (speakers’ expenses, rent large facility for ½ or full day, catering as necessary for approximately 200 participants)</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research, write and publish report that documents the state of sustainability in the Nanaimo region (cost of obtaining data [approx. $3000], designing and publishing reports [approx. $5000], disseminating report to every household in region as a special edition of Regional Perspectives [approx. $9000])</td>
<td>$17,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public event to discuss the results of the report that documents the state of sustainability in the Nanaimo region (speakers expenses, rent large facility for ½ or full day, catering as necessary for approximately 200 participants)</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research, write and publish report that documents how the sustainability of the Nanaimo region can be improved.</td>
<td>$5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and implement regional sustainability awards program</td>
<td>$2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committee meetings (cost of refreshments, sending agendas via courier, cost of meeting materials/associated office supplies, other miscellaneous expenses)</td>
<td>$200 per meeting x maximum of 12 meetings per year x 3 years = $7200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$61,200 over 3 years</strong></td>
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The Project budget is subject to confirmation through the annual formal budget review process each year.

The Project budget does not include staff time.
APPENDIX 1:
INDICATORS

1. Population density inside and outside Urban Containment Boundaries
2. Amount of land inside and outside Urban Containment Boundaries
3. Number of applications to change the Urban Containment Boundaries
4. Diversity of housing types in designated nodes.
5. Diversity of amenities in designated nodes.
6. Housing within 400 metres of amenities (retail facilities, services, schools, green space, and bus stops).
7. Actual use of rural land.
8. Resource industry employment by sector.
9. Drinking water: annual number of samples testing positive for fecal coliform.
10. Quality of treated effluent from sewage treatment plants.
11. Number of public bathing site closures.
12. Number of shellfish harvesting closures.
14. Percentage of sensitive ecosystems designated as a development permit area for the purpose of protecting the natural environment.
15. Air quality: ground level ozone and particulate matter (PM$_{2.5}$)
16. Percentage of watercourses designated as a development permit area for the purpose of protecting sensitive riparian habitat adjacent to watercourses.
17. Percentage of shoreline having intact adjacent vegetation.
18. Number of bus riders.
19. Mode of transportation to work.
20. Unemployment rate.
21. Educational attainment levels.
22. Type of occupations.
24. Income distribution.
25. Households spending over 30% of their income on housing.
27. Amount of garbage to landfill and amount recycled per resident.
28. Serviced households per kilometer of sanitary sewer line and per kilometer of water line, inside Urban Containment Boundaries.
29. Narrative description of senior government decisions contrary to official community plans.
30. Narrative description of annual initiatives to support and implement the regional growth strategy involving the RDN.