



Sustainable Sackville

Executive Summary of Resident Survey Report

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Executive Summary

In October 2009, the Sackville Town Council invited the Tantramar Planning District Commission (TPDC) to coordinate the Town's Integrated Community Sustainability Plan process; the project was named Sustainable Sackville. The first phase of this project includes several methods for gathering information from the community and included this survey. The survey was also the first opportunity for community-participation in the process.

The survey included 24 questions and was sent to each household within Town limits and available through the Internet. Responses were received from December 2nd to December 18th, 2009. 245 surveys were returned (approximately half paper, half electronic). Survey respondents represented the adults in the town, with almost half of all respondents being 18-39 years. Only 40 people who responded to the survey had children under the age of 12 years in their household. The average number of children in the household for those respondents was 2. The average number of people per respondent household was 3.3 persons. The majority of survey respondents (59%) owned their own homes, with 39% renting, and 2% who still live at home with parents.

Survey results showed the quality of life of the small, friendly town was the most frequent quality that respondents liked about the Town. While there was an interest in seeing the town prosper, significant community growth (population-wise) was not a priority. The cultural strength of the community as well as the natural beauty of the surrounding area figured prominently in responses. It was acknowledged by many that Mount Allison University's presence in the town provided for a more richer and diverse quality of life than would be possible without this nationally-recognized leader in post-secondary education.

While there are many good things respondents recognized in the town, there were also a number of suggestions for improvements and changes. The most frequent response was the need for more restaurants and businesses in the downtown core. Increased business and service presence in the central area of town would require less travel outside the community for basic necessities. The majority of respondents identified a preference for more local, independent businesses, as opposed to large franchises or retail chains. Improvement to infrastructure was another frequent response; these improvements would be related to water lines, wheelchair accessible curbing, improved road conditions, street lights at King and Main Streets, and additional street lighting along certain roads. The third topic most reported was the need for public transportation – both for within town limits, as well as between Sackville and Amherst and/or Moncton for commuters.

It was apparent from the range answers that survey respondents have different ideas of what sustainability refers to. In the Sustainable Sackville project, it is important to note that we have a balanced approach to sustainability – which includes environmental AND economic AND social components. And, while most associated sustainability by focusing on local (local food, local jobs, etc.), one respondent provided the following comment: *For more than a generation, we have been living in a global village. To think solely in local terms is to deny that fundamental reality. Therefore, as we attempt to invent and practice sustainable living we need to blend local and global viewpoints in ways that will:*

- a) minimize or eliminate the depletion of non-renewable resources;*
- b) minimize or eliminate the production and discard of non-biodegradable substances;*
- c) use renewable resources moderately and sustainably; and*
- d) ensure that all may meet their needs without compromising the needs of others.*

The survey then asked community members to identify the areas of most concern for them. Top of the list was the lack of variety of downtown businesses was rated a high concern by the largest proportion of respondents (67%), followed closely by water quality (66%). Availability of medical services was identified repeatedly in the overall survey results, including in this question with the limited number of

family doctors being a main concern for 61% of respondents. Concern for the security of local jobs was a main concern for 60%. Effectiveness of local government was a concern for 58%, followed by the long-term stability of the dykes and rising sea levels both being a main concern for 55% of respondents.

Respondents were then asked how Sackville could become more sustainable. Responses indicated that there is no one answer to becoming sustainable, but that it is a combination of individual, governmental, and private sector responses that together will make this community more sustainable in the long term. However, the three top responses for becoming more sustainable were to have more locally produced food, have more opportunities to use renewable energy sources, and for the municipality to lead by example.

The survey then turned to current residential practices. In terms of home heating, the sources almost always included electricity as either a main source or supplemental source (almost 60%), with oil (37%) and wood (29%) the most common heating sources used at the present time. "Other" types of heating sources listed in responses include propane, biomass, and heat pumps.

Respondents were asked what types of things they did to reduce waste in their households and they responded with more than 850 activities. 90% recycle (use blue bags) and 94% use reusable grocery bags. Almost half of all respondents also use reusable mugs, lunch bags, return bottles and compost (green bags or backyard system).

In their efforts to reduce energy use at home, 214 respondents undertook almost 1700 energy-reducing activities all combined. The most popular energy saving activities were buying energy efficient light bulbs and washing laundry in cold water. Many respondents also turn lights off when not in use and reduce their thermostats, particularly at night time.

191 people responded to this question providing 652 ways they reduce water use in their homes. 88% of respondents only wash full loads of laundry and a further 63% of respondents take short showers. More than half (56%) turn the tap off while brushing, and 36% invested in a low flush toilet.

Most survey respondents indicated they lived within the serviced area of the Town of Sackville. It is not surprising then, that most respondents do not have far to travel to work. The median¹ "commute" to work or school for respondents was 1 km. The average commute was 8.3km per day, which includes 5-10 respondents who commute to Amherst or Moncton on a regular basis. 45% of respondents can walk to work or school. 35% use a personal vehicle, 5% carpool, and 14% use a bicycle except in winter.

Respondents identified various strategies used to reduce their dependence on motorized vehicle use. 76% (137 respondents) choose to walk or bike to their destination. 62% (112 respondents) choose to combine errands in a single trip. 36% (65 respondents) find a place to park in town, and then walk to their various destinations. Carpooling and use of taxi service are other options.

One of the principles of sustainability is related to food – where it comes from and how far it travels to get to your plate from the plant/animal is something many of us rarely consider. The other question related to sustainability and food, is how far we travel to buy our food. Respondents were asked where they purchased their food. 96% of all survey respondents buy some of their groceries from Sackville grocery stores, but 62% also travel to Amherst or Moncton for groceries on a regular basis. The reasons for going to these stores outside of town include better selection, more and better quality organic produce, and better prices. Further 58% of respondents frequent the local farmers market. There were many

¹ The "median" takes out the very high and very low numbers and arrives at the most common number.

comments provided throughout the survey that more frequent farmers market or a permanent location for the market would be an excellent initiative. Respondents also grown their own food in private gardens (35%), or in the community garden (8%), 20% take part in the Community Supported Agriculture, and 36% buy direct from local farmers.

Volunteerism is an important indicator for community engagement which is a key to sustainable community living. Sackville citizens have a long history of community involvement. The survey results show that the vast majority (72%) of survey respondents volunteer in some way in the community and a further 6% are planning to volunteer in some manner. Of those that volunteer, 44% of respondents volunteer for various community organizations, including groups related to health, food, families, and the environment. 17% volunteer for church-related organizations, 16% for children and youth organizations, 13% with sports groups, and a further 10% for other organizations.

Active living is a key indicator of a healthy population and therefore a sustainable community. One of the most basic indicators is how much activity people take part in regularly. Survey respondents were asked: "What types of recreational activities do you or your family members take part in on a regular basis?" 146 people responded to this question identifying almost 800 different activities that they take part in regularly. 68% of the activities were unorganized (including such things as running, skiing, walking, canoing/kayaking, biking, and swimming). 32% of the activities were "organized" and include such things as martial arts, dancing (lessons), hockey, volleyball, ice skating, basketball, soccer, curling, etc. Only 2% of respondents indicated that they did no kind of activity at all.

In terms of making Sackville a more sustainable place to live, more than 150 responses were provided. Responses are summarized below:

- The municipality needs to lead the community through the development of policy and regulations (and enforcement of regulations), such as densification of downtown, idling policies, environmentally-friendly businesses (large and small), and stricter building standards for energy efficiency.
- Community members need to be provided with viable options in order to change their activities – more local food buying or growing opportunities are desired, separate green/blue garbage cans throughout town to encourage people to separate, more stores and services so community members don't have to go out of town, and public transportation alternatives to personal vehicles.
- Community Education is key to success of any sustainability plan – to build support for the direction, and to show residents why it is so important to change our old ways of doing things. There is a cost both to action and non-action (economically, environmentally, and socially). Respondents suggested the following specific topics for education: garbage separation, supporting local businesses, renewable energy, and climate change.

Summary

This survey resulted in a wide range of contributions from community members for the Sustainable Sackville initiative. While there is not 100% agreement about what sustainability means, it is apparent that community members are interested in maintaining and/or improving the quality of life in our small town for decades to come. The local economy, range of human services and amenities, and the natural environment all play key roles in our quality of life in Sackville – if any of them fail, our community members will feel the impact. There are many more details available in the full survey report, which we invite all community members to read through.