

# Sustainable Communities Conference and Trade Show 2008 Moving Innovation Into Practice

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## Motivating people to sustainable action



How do we go about delivering to our children not only a world they want to live in, but one it's possible to live in?

In his keynote address on Friday morning, urban planner Larry Beasley said the key to

sustainability is shifting the emphasis at the municipal government level. Through working with experts and investing time to learn about the issues, Beasley said, "Now we know what we have to do for sustainability..."

It's about the structure of the city and the infrastructure of the city."

Collaboration between science and politics will lead to change, and Beasley said the key is engaging people in the process, both as citizens and consumers. To motivate people to sustainable action, he said, is to motivate acceptance of another way of life.

Community engagement must be done on terms the citizens can agree to, especially if those changes include contentious issues, like neighbourhood densification. People don't always accept that what is good for the planet will be good for them when it's right next door. The public dialogue has to be genuinely interesting, on a personal level.

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## Dion unveils "contract with Canadians"

A Liberal government will assign the first \$3 billion of any federal surplus to debt reduction, then invest the rest in sustainable infrastructure, Opposition Leader Stéphane Dion announced in his keynote address Friday morning.

"This is nothing less than a contract between a Liberal government and the Canadians of today and tomorrow," he said. "We refuse to condemn our children to a Canada with filthy water, insufficient public

transport, and crumbling bridges. Our commitment to addressing

Canada's infrastructure deficit is so strong

that we will legislate a mechanism to create this contract."

Getting Canada's fiscal house in order was an achievement of a previous Liberal government, and "we will never allow Canada to go through it again," Dion told participants. The Liberals' "iron-clad commitment to balanced budgets and debt reduction" is matched by an interest in working with cities and communities to reverse the infrastructure deficit.

He said every budget under a Liberal government would include a \$3 billion contingency fund to deal with floods, epidemics, and other unforeseen crises. At the end of the year, any unspent dollars in that



fund will go to debt reduction, and any additional federal surplus will be invested in roads, sewers, transit, waste management, and other infrastructure.

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# Moving Innovation Into Practice



## FCM CEO Brock Carlton: Message of the Day

“At the opening, I noted that Googling the word ‘sustainability’ yields over 27.5 million links. While this points to the attention to the issue, it also points to the dilution of the concept to mean so many things that it’s almost meaningless. As Bob Willard stressed this morning, to make the concept relevant and accessible enough to inspire action, we have to find language that is simple and resonates with the many audiences to which the concepts of sustainability are relevant. If we want

to influence public policy, then the language needs to be understood by policy-makers. If we want to influence the private sector, they need to see their language and concerns reflected in the discourse. What we have learned at this conference helps us all with our specific goals. Learning how to free ourselves from the vagaries of the word ‘sustainability’ and finding more direct language will help liberate the creativity of self-interest that will drive many others to action.”

## Motivating people to sustainable action

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In Vancouver, people are tuning into the sustainable agenda because of the dialogues that are taking place.

As a first step to make the city more sustainable, Vancouver City Hall had to be reinvented. Instead of a large new department, Vancouver created a tiny office within City government that “is the government’s conscience of sustainability,” chaired by a variety of department heads. “Efficiencies are up, morale is better, and sustainability is unfolding because of these integrations,” Beasley said. There also needs to be a continuing stream of communication to keep politicians and their staff involved.

City Hall must also act as a facilitator between developers and citizens, to find equitable solutions. “I’m talking about an honourable relationship between honourable equals who both have a job to do. I’m talking about working together, rather than at cross purposes.”

A sustainable city will present a challenge to some citizens, asking them to give up things they take for granted today. However, Beasley says, “You get the city you decide you want.”

Green Cart program that took its inspiration from Dr. Seuss. Opening with an entertaining poem, it provides information simple enough for children to understand, and engaging for adults.

## Capacity Building in Waste Management – An Interactive Workshop

Increasing the amount of waste diverted can potentially double the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, speakers at the Capacity Building in Waste Management workshop said on Friday. They discussed strategies for increasing waste diversion.

Canadians throw away \$1 to \$2 billion annually in potentially recyclable material. Nearly half of municipal solid waste is recyclable—mostly paper—and another 28% is compostable food and yard material. Michael Cant, senior associate with Golder Associates, said increasing waste diversion from 36% to 54% could double the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

options for managing that waste, including anaerobic digesters and reactor and non-reactor composting systems. The amount of waste diverted in Canada is increasing, but was still only 24% in 2004.

Hamilton, Ontario’s Manager of Solid Waste Planning, Pat Parker, said the face-to-face communication approach was key to engaging residents in a Green Cart composting program. Outlining the details of this curb-side pickup program for organic materials, Parker said they used humour in televised “It Doesn’t Have to be that Difficult” ads to address possible barriers. “We raised some eyebrows, because we pushed the envelope,” she said, but they also found new and effective ways to communicate with their urban, suburban, and rural population of 504,000 people.

Her department developed a storybook/operating manual for the

Cant also examined current trends in waste generation, and available



# Moving Innovation Into Practice



## Business builds momentum toward sustainability

Within the next few years, the business community will reach a tipping point in terms of embracing sustainability, predicts author Bob Willard, and municipalities can help businesses get there.

At Friday's Communicating the Business Case for Sustainability session, Willard said businesses go through different stages as they embrace sustainability, from pre-compliance, to compliance with regulatory enforcement, to "beyond compliance" (adopting eco-efficiencies and improving public relations). The next stage is developing a fully integrated sustainability strategy. The tipping point will be reached when 20% of businesses have entered that stage.

"The action is happening at the municipal level," said Willard. As leaders in the sustainability field, municipalities can influence businesses by speaking their language. Municipalities may use terms like "sustainability" and "smart growth," but businesses think in terms of asset management and capital—financial, natural, human, and social. Another strategy for influencing the business community is to engage stakeholders—particularly youth, who can strongly influence their parents.

Although most companies haven't yet adopted integrated strategies, the business environment is changing. Brand image and reputation are increasingly important, and customers and investors are demanding more sus-

tainable business practices. In 2006, the number of consumers switching to green companies jumped from 10 to 20%. "This is a critical mass and a wakeup call," Willard said. This group of stakeholders is putting more pressure on companies.

For businesses, all risks—regulatory, legal, and physical—associated with climate change are significant, but most important are the risks to reputation and the need to maintain investor confidence. To offset these risks and prepare for government regulations on carbon emissions, businesses are making their own changes. Companies in Canada and the United States are disclosing their carbon emissions and setting up voluntary carbon cap and trade systems.

Change is taking place to avoid risk, but also to capture opportunity. An integrated sustainability strategy can help small or medium-sized enterprises increase profits by at least 66%, said Willard. Globally, the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change predicts \$2.5 trillion in benefits if the world acts now to mitigate climate change—or a global depression if it doesn't.



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## IN THE HALLS

### *What's next?*

We have to put what we've learned to good use. The various lenses through which sustainability was discussed were inspiring and stimulating. I've gotten lots of good ideas to bring back to my colleagues and to my city.

Danielle Lussier,  
Ville de Montréal, Québec

The conference was great. I got to hear about how others are defining their future. Now I'm ready to hear about how they are taking action.

Kim Graham, City of Saint John,  
New Brunswick

We're going to work on a lot of the ideas that were talked about. For example, it's time for us to act on making our buildings energy efficient. This conference showed me that other municipalities have done it, and we can do it too.

Zoe Morrison,  
City of Whitehorse, Yukon

Our community is in the process of greening its operations. The networking and discussions that happened here will lead to action on the ground.

Denny Richard, City of  
Bouctouche, New Brunswick

For us, it's a matter of implementing our sustainability plan. We want to make it a living document, and build capacity in the community.

Nina Gales, Town of Olds, Alberta

# Moving Innovation Into Practice



## Making Cities More Walkable



*Delegates toured downtown Ottawa with walkability experts in Part 2 of the Winter Walkability session.*

The best way to increase walkability is to create a culture of walking at the public and municipal levels, said speakers at Part 1 of the Winter Walkability session on Friday.

Jacky Kennedy from Green Communities Canada asked participants whether their municipalities understood the benefits of walking. If not, there could be no progress towards walkable communities. Her organization helps communities create that culture through “Walkability Roadshows,” where diverse stakeholders can discuss walkability.

The City of Greater Sudbury participated in a walkability roadshow in 2007. City representative Paul Baskomb said the process was a valuable opportunity to enhance the city’s healthy community model. It also allowed community members to identify key winter walkability issues, such as snow removal, transit stops, and the limited mobility of an aging community.

David Maclsaac said Transport Canada’s role was to share information, and the Ministry wanted municipalities to learn about walkability best practices in Canada. It’s a small but growing part of its mandate, since Transport Canada views walkability as one of the foundations of a sustainable transportation system.

Jody Rosenblatt Naderi of Texas A&M University said people who walk are in the best position to tell municipalities what they need and want. She described practical design features for walkable cities, and proposed non-traditional transportation planning policies such as providing contact with nature, including benches and trees, and allowing walking area space for neighbourhood regulars along with travelling pedestrians. “Make a network of good civic spaces,” she told participants, “and you’ll create a more walkable municipality.”



## IN THE HALLS

Two years ago, we were still questioning whether climate change was real. Now we know it’s here and we have to do the hard work to deal with it.

Shellenn Lakusta, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association

The next big thing will be dealing with issues surrounding the food supply, such as composting, use of plastic bags and waste management. Consumers will continue to pressure both businesses and municipalities to take action on this.

Pierre Lussier, Director,  
Jour de la Terre Québec

Our municipality is in the first stages of this process and still faces many challenges, so this was a fact-finding mission for me. I was impressed with the variety of concrete examples and actions on display. Theory is one thing, but action is an easier sell.

Alain Beaulieu,  
Cité de Dorval, Québec

## Dion unveils “contract with Canadians”

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“Infrastructure investment is a national issue, and should be treated as a national economic investment to keep Canada competitive,” he said. “We need to work with you, with complete respect for provincial jurisdiction and responsibilities, to meet this challenge head on.”