



Sustainable  
Bridgewater

[www.bridgewater.ca/sustainability](http://www.bridgewater.ca/sustainability)

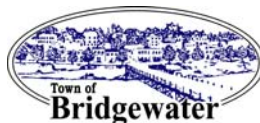
An initiative of  
the Town of  
Bridgewater  
Nova Scotia

# Sustainability Visions, Challenges & Priorities

## A Discussion Guide for Community Members

November 2008

Produced by the Planning Department of the Town of Bridgewater, Nova Scotia



## Introduction

The Town of Bridgewater has made a commitment to becoming a more sustainable community. The first step down this path is to create an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP). We will be creating this plan between 2008 and 2010, by working closely with people and organizations of the Bridgewater community. This planning process is called “Sustainable Bridgewater”.

Through earlier public consultations called “imagine Bridgewater”, members of our community made it clear that we want to live in a community that is clean, vibrant, and a good place to live and work. We want to live in a community that meets today’s needs, and the needs of future generations. In other words, a “sustainable” community: one that can support an attractive economy, serving a healthy and equitable population, all living within the Earth’s means.

## Sustainability

Important questions need to be answered in order to understand what it means to become a sustainable community. For example:

- How do we ensure economic strength in tough times?
- How do we tackle the steady rise of chronic disease?
- How can we adapt to the impacts of climate change?
- What can we do to ensure that we always have a healthy and affordable food supply?
- What do we do as a community when oil starts to run out?
- How can the most vulnerable members of our community meet their basic needs?

We need to tackle these sustainability challenges, but how do we make this practical? And what are the most important things we need to focus on? We have limited resources – how should we spend them?

Sustainable Bridgewater is tackling the challenges head-on through a process of public dialogue on these important issues. By talking to each other and working together, we can start finding answers to these questions. More importantly, we can start doing something to achieve a positive future.

### What is Sustainability?

Sustainability means living in such a way that future generations can enjoy as much quality of life as we do. To help make this practical, we use a science-based definition of sustainability called The Natural Step. The Natural Step outlines a clear set of goals for a sustainable society, which we summarize as:

- all people have the capacity to meet their basic needs
- pollutants do not continuously build up in the environment
- natural ecosystems do not become continuously degraded

For more information on The Natural Step, visit [www.naturalstep.ca](http://www.naturalstep.ca)

## Hosting a Discussion on Sustainability

This discussion guide designed as an introduction to the topic of sustainability, and the chance for you, as members of this community, to give direct input into the Town's planning process. It can be used by any group, for example:

- A group of friends or family
- Colleagues at a workplace
- Neighbours
- A club, sports team, or association
- A group of students

Hosting a community discussion on sustainability is easy!

- 1 Bring people together**

Invite your friends, family, neighbors, or colleagues to attend a discussion on creating a sustainable future for Bridgewater. Anyone can take part if they care about the future of this community. Advertising may be a good idea.
- 2 Prepare your venue**

Find an appropriate space, whether it's a meeting room, a living room, a classroom, or an outdoor space. See our "tips" section for advice on setting up your space.
- 3 Host a conversation**

Plan on taking 1-3 hours for the conversation, or do several conversations if your group is keen. The most important tasks for the host are to help keep the conversation on the topic, and to take notes. See our "tips" section for advice on how to be a good facilitator.
- 4 Tell us how it went**

Report the results of your conversation to us. Type up your notes and email them to [sustainability@bridgewater.ca](mailto:sustainability@bridgewater.ca), or find our other contact information at the end of this document. We would appreciate seeing the conversation notes categorized according to the 3 topics below, but this is just a guideline. The most important thing is that we hear what your group had to say.
- 5 Follow up**

The Town of Bridgewater will take your group's comments seriously and we'll follow up by including them in our planning process. However, in order to create a sustainable future, everyone needs to get involved. Your group might want to challenge itself to get involved too. If any concrete ideas came out of the discussion, see if you can put some of those ideas into action. Set goals for the group, and organize another meeting date to see how close you are to achieving your ideas. The best part is that if you tell us about what your group is doing to make a difference, we'll make sure to let the community know!

**REMEMBER:** As host you do not need to be an expert but simply a concerned member of your community; someone with the ability to bring together a group of people, introduce the topic, and to moderate a positive discussion. You may wish to divide the tasks of promotion, hosting, and reporting among several people, which is a very useful approach. In any case, we are confident that you will find the experience brings you and your community closer to building a brighter future.

## Questions for Discussion

Our planning process is trying to find answers to the following specific questions, and we would like to hear what your group has to say about them. You can use them as a way to organize your discussion, and the notes that you send to us. But don't restrict your discussion to just these questions – be creative!

### **What is our vision for Bridgewater as a sustainable community?**

A “sustainable community” is one where people want to live because it is clean, vibrant, and a good place to live and work. In a sustainable society, our community would also be living within the Earth's means, and all people would be able to meet their basic needs. If Bridgewater manages to become a truly sustainable community 30 years from now, what would it be like? What would you see if you walked down the street? How would you feel to be a member of this community? What would people be doing, and how would they be living? Be creative, and challenge yourselves to come up with a positive vision for the future.

1

*\* TIP: come up with a single group vision statement for what Bridgewater would be like as a sustainable community, or allow each group member to produce their own individual statements*

---

### **What are the critical sustainability challenges facing Bridgewater?**

If a sustainable community is what we want to become, what is holding us back from achieving that today? Why is it so challenging to become sustainable? What are the root causes of non-sustainability? Your group may want to break the question down into environmental, social, cultural, and economic barriers.

2

---

### **What should our priorities be in becoming a sustainable community?**

Sustainability is a huge topic, and there are many challenges facing our community. But which ones are the most important to work on and achieve success in? Which offer the greatest risks for this community? Alternatively, which offer the greatest opportunities for improvement?

3

*\* TIP: come up with a prioritized list that your group can agree on. This list does not need to be ranked by number (ie. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> priorities etc.)*

## Discussion Tips

### Work as a Team

The most important asset in organizing an event is you - a dedicated and passionate individual who cares deeply about the development challenges faced by your community. But you don't have to organize this event on your own. We encourage you work with a partner, or in a group. Great things are achieved when individuals work together as a team.

### Advertise your Discussion (optional)

Spreading the word is one of the most critical actions of event planning if you want to ensure a well attended session. There are many ways to advertise your event with little or no cost. Below are some of the advertising methods you could easily deploy to let people know about your event.

### Create an Agenda

Creating an agenda (including the title of the meeting, items on the agenda, and the time schedule) on a blackboard or sheet of paper before the meeting. This will allow participants as they arrive to quickly understand the context and be better prepared for the meeting. An agenda enables you to organize your event and inform others about what to expect. The following is a sample which you can follow.

#### Today's Meeting: Sustainable Bridgewater – What's our Vision?

2:00	Welcome & introduction
2:05	Icebreaker
2:15	Q1: What is our vision for Bridgewater as a sustainable community?
2:45	Q2: What are the critical sustainability challenges facing Bridgewater?
3:15	Q3: What should our priorities be in becoming a sustainable community?
3:45	Conclusion & setting the next meeting date
4:00	Adjourn

### Arrange Your Venue

Adjust the furniture (tables and chairs) to ensure all participants are able to sit comfortably and to interact with each other. Circles and horse-shoes are good arrangements for discussions. Keep note paper or flip charts handy to write up group brainstorm lists. It is also a good idea for you to write the sustainability questions on the blackboard.

### **Start and End on Time**

It is important that you start on time for the meeting for a number of reasons. Firstly, to respect the participants who have taken the effort to arrive on time. Secondly, starting on time will also allow you to following the agenda items of the meeting more effectively; otherwise, important components might be shortchanged if the time is reduced.

### **Start with an Icebreaker**

Incorporating an icebreaker in your introduction is highly recommended if your participants don't know each other well. The icebreaker will greatly enhance the interaction and discussion, and help participants feel relaxed and comfortable. A simple and effective icebreaker is to divide the participants into pairs and have them interview each other. Provide each participant with a few questions in advance to ease them into their discussion. For example, these questions could be "what are you current hobbies?", "what is the most interesting place you have visited?", and "why are you attending this meeting?" After the scheduled time is over, allow each participant to introduce the other participant to the rest of the group. This process is short and will create an atmosphere that is more open and friendly. Keep the icebreaker to about 10-15 minutes at most.

### **Act as a Guide**

Your role for this meeting is to support others in generating ideas and to facilitate positive interaction between participants. Encourage each participant to share his/her thoughts with the group and allow all participants to have the opportunity to share their comments. Your role is not to dominate the discussion. If you wish, you may act as, or appoint, a facilitator. Here are some facilitation tips:

- The facilitator's principal role is to stimulate and moderate the discussion by asking questions, identifying key points, and managing the group process.
- The facilitator is not an expert, does not have the answers or may even not be the most knowledgeable person about the topic for the week.
- The facilitator will keep the discussions focused on the session's topic.
- A primary goal is for everyone to participate in each session. As facilitator will try and draw out quiet participants by creating an opportunity for each person to contribute.
- On the other hand, an important role of the facilitator is to restrain a domineering participant. The facilitator will try and not let one or two people take over the conversation.
- Focus on generating ideas, rather than dwelling or commenting on ideas that have already been said. Each participant is entitled to their own views. It's not necessary to over-analyze people's comments, and it leads to people feeling that their ideas are undervalued.

### **Be Positive**

Please remember that throughout the meeting to focus on being positive. Your positive words and behaviour will encourage participants to interact and exchange ideas with each other in the same way. At the same time you want to respect comments made by all participants. If a participant is negative, remind the group that they have gathered to brainstorm ideas and to support and encourage each other in offering their ideas and suggestions.

## Carry Momentum Forward

It is very important for you to close the meeting with momentum going forward. This will ensure that the discussion generated during the meeting will lead to action. The following instructions are simple and easy ways to satisfy participants that with their help their ideas will carry forward when they depart from the meeting.

- **Contact Information Sheet:** Circulate a contact information sheet allowing participants to share their contact information (email and telephone number) with others who participated at the meeting. However, before you circulate this sheet, make sure to ask for the group's consent. Individuals who do not wish to provide information should not be included in the contact list. After the meeting concludes, you should, without delay, email the contact information sheet to those who provided consent.
- **Set a Date for Next Meeting:** Before the meeting concludes, you also should ask participants for suggestions on a follow-up meeting and select a date, time, and location that is most convenient for the majority. Remember people will remain more motivated if the meeting happens within a reasonable period of time.

## Contact Information

### **Leon de Vreede**

Sustainability Planner  
Town of Bridgewater  
60 Pleasant Street  
Bridgewater, NS B4V 3X9  
t. 902.541.4390  
f. 902.543.6876  
email: [ldevreede@bridgewater.ca](mailto:ldevreede@bridgewater.ca)

### **Eric Shaw** M.Sc.PI., MCIP, LPP

Director of Planning  
Town of Bridgewater  
60 Pleasant Street  
Bridgewater, NS B4V 3X9  
t. 902.541.4368  
f. 902.543.6876  
email: [eshaw@bridgewater.ca](mailto:eshaw@bridgewater.ca)

### **Bernie Maughan**

Public Participation Coordinator  
Town of Bridgewater  
60 Pleasant Street  
Bridgewater, NS B4V 3X9  
t. 902.541.4386  
f. 902.543.6876  
email: [bmaughan@bridgewater.ca](mailto:bmaughan@bridgewater.ca)

You can send your discussion notes to [sustainability@bridgewater.ca](mailto:sustainability@bridgewater.ca)  
For more information, please visit the project website at [www.bridgewater.ca/sustainability](http://www.bridgewater.ca/sustainability)

## Other Resources on Sustainability

### Books:

*The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns can Change to Sustainable Practices.* By Sarah James and Torbjörn Lahti. New Society Publishers (2004).

*Toward Sustainable Communities: Resources for Citizens and Their Governments.* By Jeb Brugmann and Mark Roseland. New Society Publishers (2005).

### Websites:

[www.gov.ns.ca/econ](http://www.gov.ns.ca/econ)

This site will give you more information on how the Nova Scotia Government is progressing with Economic Development and Sustainability.

[www.rrfb.com](http://www.rrfb.com)

Resource Recovery Fund Board Inc. – Lots of interesting links for recycling & recovery of everyday products.

[www.eco-efficiency.management.dal.ca/](http://www.eco-efficiency.management.dal.ca/)

The Eco-Efficiency Centre works with partners to build a competitive economy that is sustainable for future generations.

<http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/corporate/programs.cfm>

This site will link you to the ecoENERGY Efficiency Initiative with information on Energy Efficiency Programs.

<http://www.conservens.ca/slc>

Find some smart lighting choices with this link.

[www.naturalstep.ca](http://www.naturalstep.ca)

Go to this site to learn more about The Natural Step.

<http://www.oee.nrcan.gc.ca/energuide>

This site offers energy efficiency information on appliances, heating & cooling equipment, houses, and cars.

<http://www.oee.nrcan.gc.ca/transportation/personal/>

Follow the links on this site to conserve energy, save money and help save the environment when running your vehicle.

<http://www.clean.ns.ca/>

Excellent resources, including information on how to get a government grant to have a complete energy audit done for your home.

<http://www.atlanticsustainability.ca/>

A network of organizations working toward sustainability in Atlantic Canada – they're looking for new members right now.