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Confused About Municipal ICSP/NDCC Fuel Tax Requirements, MSPs and the Many Faces of "Sustainability"?

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You are not alone. The catch-all term "sustainability" has been applied to every conceivable longer term or environmental idea, project and plan -not just for municipalities, but for individuals, corporations and countries. There are worthy and innovative ideas among them, but the volume may be overwhelming.

According to the 2007 Alberta Municipal CAO Survey, 81% of rural municipalities had begun or completed an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan. Only 30% of villages, 39% of towns, and 56% of cities and specialized municipality respondents had begun or completed their ICSP.

Municipalities must comply with the terms of the May 14, 2005 Canada-Alberta Agreement on the Transfer of Federal Gas Tax Revenues under the New Deal for Cities and Communities 2005-2015 (NDCC), to qualify. Each municipality entered into an NDCC agreement with the province in which they agreed to submit four things:

- (1) a Project Profile for each project,
- (2) an annual summary Application for Program Acceptance,
- (3) a Multi-Year Capital Infrastructure Plan, and
- (4) an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (by December 31, 2008).

It is not as intimidating as it sounds. Both levels of government state that "Integrated Community Sustainability Plan" means any existing or new long-term plan developed in consultation with community members, for the community to realize sustainability it has for the environmental, cultural, social and economic dimensions of its identity. An ICSP needs to be a plan addressing those dimensions with community input and be long term in scope.

Although the original 2005 communications about ICSPs were more stringent, even they made generous allowances in the agreement for smaller communities with limited

capacity, provided for project funding under the NDCC for resources to complete the requirements, and had very limited qualification expectations from the smallest and poorest communities. Capacity building and human resources to complete an ICSP is considered a legitimate expense.

The AAMDC website points out that your existing long term plans and all consultations with the community and community organizations could be plugged into an ICSP template. AUMA has produced a Fast Track Municipal Sustainability Planning guide linked to their website. The process can be as big or as small as you choose. It does need to demonstrate long term fiscal, environmental, cultural and social commitment and planning, and those plans need to make sense in conjunction with your Multi-Year Capital Infrastructure Plan.

The provincial government must review the success of the NDCC Canada- Alberta agreement with the federal government by March 2009, showing the progress of Alberta communities under this program to ensure the extension of the program to 2015 and beyond. Municipal participation and compliance is a defining condition of both agreements.

If you municipality has not completed "an existing or new long-term plan developed in consultation with community members, for the community to realize sustainability it has for the environmental, cultural, social and economic dimensions of its identity" to fulfill that reporting requirement as of December 31, 2008, there are many ways to get it done.

Choose the size and type of process that reflects your community's priorities, culture and capacity for your NDCC/ICSP/MSP compliance, and provide or hire the human resources to get it done, but get your ICSP or MSP together very soon!

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