

Town of Steady Brook

Municipal Plan Review and Integrated Community Sustainability Plan Visioning Workshop Summary

A Public Visioning Workshop was held on January 21 as a component of the Municipal Plan Review and Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) being undertaken by the Town of Steady Brook.

In this workshop, citizens, town councilors, staff and representatives of local groups and organizations discussed and debated the kind of future they want for the community, the challenges that need to be overcome and opportunities that could be pursued to ensure future prosperity for the town and its citizens. Participants explored the steps that could be taken to ensure that Steady Brook remains a viable, safe and healthy community, and the role that citizens, the local council and others have in achieving this.

Mayor Thistle opened the meeting by welcoming residents and introducing the consultants from CBCL Limited hired by the Town to undertake the Plan Review and prepare the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan. After a brief presentation on sustainability, the Municipal Plan and the ICSP process, the workshop participants were asked to contribute words or phrases that would describe the kind of town residents want Steady Brook to be in the future.

- A unique community that
 - Has a rural character
 - Is in tune with the environment
 - Retains its natural beauty
 - Offers high quality of life for its citizens
- Family oriented community
 - That can be considered a life-long home
 - That is a safe place to live
 - An affordable place to live
 - Is able to meet the needs of residents of all ages
- Close to Corner Brook yet distant enough to feel autonomous
- Where there is a strong sense of community pride and volunteerism

For the remainder of the workshop participants worked in small groups to think about the Town's environment, culture, society and economy. For each area of discussion the groups created lists of the strengths/ opportunities, and weaknesses/ threats. The groups then identified goals and actions which would build on the identified strengths/ opportunities or mitigate the weaknesses/ threats. Each small group then reported back to the larger group to share their results. The following is a summary of what came forward as a result of these group

discussions, with particular emphasis on points that were mentioned by multiple participants and matters that will need further consideration.

Environment

There was much agreement that Steady Brook is nestled within an area of exceptional natural beauty - the Humber River, Marble Mountain, and the Humber Valley in general. The community itself is regarded as having a park-like feeling, with ample green space that citizens value. Lack of pollution, a short walking trail and a low density of development were also noted as strengths/assets of the community. In addition, the low density development pattern of the community was raised consistently among the groups as an important feature of the community to be preserved and protected.

Environmental concerns identified by participants included potential flooding of Steady Brook. The consultant noted that floodplain mapping for Steady Brook is outdated and may not be accurate today and into the future. Given what is known about the impacts of climate change, we can expect increased intensity and duration of storms that will affect floodplains .

The impact of climate change was also discussed in terms of possible impacts on the Ski resort. What if the climate changes to the point where there is not enough winter snow to maintain the resort? Such a situation would obviously have an impact on businesses in Steady Brook and have a significant impact on the commercial tax base of the town.

There was considerable discussion about drinking water quality. While the town has a good water supply in terms of volume, and a well maintained chlorination and distribution system, there are issues of taste and colour. Discussion of enhancing chlorination (disinfection) with a treatment system indicated that there is interest in exploring cost effective ways of improving drinking water quality in the community. In terms of wastewater, some groups raised a question of whether the sewage lagoon has sufficient capacity to accommodate future population or loading as the number of tourist accommodations in the area increases. In this regard, ensuring that the wastewater released into the Humber River from the Sewage lagoon does not have a negative impact on the river is important.

A number of participants felt that environmental sustainability and quality of life in the community would be enhanced by expanding the trail system, maintaining green space and providing environmental education. New trails would provide recreation and a means of pedestrian transportation and a draw for tourists. The wetland ecosystem along Steady Brook is also valuable and a number of participants felt interpretive panels describing these habitats would be beneficial.

Many of the participants expressed their desire for a modern recycling and composting program (that could be implemented through the regional waste management structure) and suggested that this could be done through enhancing the community composting program that the town has had for leaf and lawn clippings.

The use of pesticides in the town was raised as something that, for a community concerned about environmental protection, should be addressed.

In terms of development in the area, a number of points were raised about the apparent lack of control over development outside the Town's immediate municipal boundaries. Development in Little Rapids, and within the Marble Mount Resort area have potential to affect the environment of Steady Brook. There was a sense that development pressures in the Town as well as in the region in general, were having an impact on the town, causing a sense of uncertainty – with rising property values, potential for unwanted development and so on.

Society

Steady Brook is fortunate to have residents who are well educated, and have generally high levels of employment and income. As such, it was generally recognized that the Town could/should make better use of the knowledge and expertise of citizens in carrying out various initiatives/activities.

Discussions indicated that residents of Steady Brook consider their community to be a safe community to live in.

The consultants noted that the community has, compared to most communities in the province, a population structure that includes many young families with children as well as older residents. It was recognized that there are older long-time residents, young families moving in and a growing multicultural presence in the community. Needs that were identified by a number of participants included seniors housing, better use of the Community Centre, more volunteerism especially among youth.

Participants at the workshop almost unanimously expressed a desire to build a stronger sense of community spirit, and returned to this theme on several occasions. It was recognized that while there are differing points of view in the community, new ways need to be found to deal with those differences and resolve community issues in a positive manner. A need for more community events was mentioned frequently as a means of building a stronger sense of community and belonging for all residents. A range of events were suggested as a means of accomplishing this, including multi-generational events or programs, community social functions, and more frequent meetings with Council, such as Town Hall meetings to discuss things like the annual budget for example.

However, it was noted that attracting volunteers to organize events such as those suggested was becoming more challenging in the Town and that in order to hold events and run programs, ways to encourage people to volunteer would be required. It was recognized that the youth of the community are a resource that needs to be encouraged to volunteer and participate in civic affairs.

Culture

There was general agreement among most participants on the cultural assets of the community, such as the library, the Warden's Cabin, and community events such as July 1st celebrations. Seniors were recognized as a community resource and it was suggested that the community could undertake a project to record the stories of seniors about early days of the community and that such an initiative could be made available at the Warden's Cabin or the Public Library. Such a project could involve youth of the community.

Having an active lifestyle and spending time in the outdoors, are also regarded as part of the culture of the community, with residents involved in activities such as gardening, skiing, fishing, walking and so on. Participants identified a desire for more recreational opportunities for all ages, including a pool, soccer pitch, walking trails/sidewalks, and an improved boat launch. A need was also identified for more recreation programming, such as gardening (a community garden was suggested), swimming lessons, and a winter carnival. In addition, it was noted that the town has a growing percentage of youth and that recreational facilities in the playground, or recreational programming should be changed to respond to the needs and interests of youth.

There is a small municipal budget for arts, culture and recreation and some participants noted that in the past the town may not have had the capacity to take advantage of funding opportunities that might be available. It was suggested that forming a recreation or social committee for the town with volunteers who could assist in this regard, might be a means of securing additional resources for culture and recreation in the community.

While not indicated by statistics from the 2006 Census, participants identified that there are a number of residents who have moved to the town with various cultural backgrounds and it was suggested that there are opportunities to celebrate the increasingly diverse community with these new residents, as a means of inclusion and building a sense of community pride and belonging.

Economy

Participants recognize the economic advantages the town has by virtue of its location and appreciate the benefits that businesses bring to their town including services that are not usually available in towns the size of Steady Brook, employment, and the contribution to the

tax base. Tourism is regarded as the key economic driver of the community, and most of the businesses located within the town are associated with the hospitality industry.

The extent, type and location of commercial development in the town was an important topic of conversation. Some participants were opposed to all forms of new commercial uses locating in the community, while others were open to the idea of limited expansion. Most people in attendance recognize that new commercial development would benefit the Town, but there was general apprehension that commercial uses, depending on the form and location of it, could detract from the residential nature and park like setting of the town.

It is understood that there are few options for locating new commercial uses, and there was some debate regarding how to address this. During the discussion, there was a general consensus that the business area of the community should continue to be limited to the western portion of town, and that the bridge over Steady Brook serve as the dividing line between the residential and commercial sections of the Community. Concerns were expressed about existing commercial establishments to the south of the Trans Canada Highway that signage be controlled so that it not become unsightly.

Participants discussed the relationship between the residential area of the community and the local businesses and noted that there were things that the community could do to support local business. These included improving community amenities, such as walking trails, directional signage and a visitor's map. It was recognized that improving community amenities would not only benefit residents, but also hospitality businesses by providing visitors with more options for things to do and perhaps as a result, encouraging them to extend their stay.

Municipal Plan and Development Regulations

A number of points of discussion are directly relevant to the review of the Town's Municipal Plan and Development Regulations.

There was considerable debate about where new commercial development in the town should be located and the extent and type of development that should be permitted. The main options discussed included

- Limiting commercial development to the undeveloped area to the west Steady Brook (which is what the current plan does)
- Opening up an area shown to east of the Steady Brook bridge on the Municipal Plan Map as Comprehensive Development Area (CDA), to commercial development.¹

¹ It should be noted that some participants asserted that this area had been re-designated for open space a number of years ago. This has been double checked with the Department of Municipal Affairs who have no record of this change having been made to the Town's Municipal Plan.

In the case of the CDA there was debate as to whether the area should be used for commercial, residential, recreation or open space uses. On this point, there was no general consensus. However, as a principle, it was generally agreed that commercial development, regardless of where it is located, must be done in a manner that respects the residential character of the community, and is of an appropriate height (so as not to block views) and scale, and that there needs to be a balance between residential, commercial/tourism development. It was agreed that the planning consultants would study this particular area more closely and provide the Town with more specific options for further consideration by the community.

Other issues raised include a need for:

- Clearer regulations and standards for development, especially for commercial uses
- Better and clearer sign regulations
- Clearer definitions of uses, particularly those listed in the regulations as discretionary uses. There was a suggestion that discretionary uses be eliminated from the Zoning regulations
- Stricter regulations with respect to all types of development and enforcement of standards – particularly those related to fire and safety

Conclusion

The meeting concluded with a request by residents that the presentation materials from the meeting be placed on the Town's website, along with links to additional information about sustainability and the ICSP process. It was also agreed that the summary of results would be made available for feedback by the end of February.