

# Thinking Like a Sustainable Community

A workbook for applying a sustainability framework to community challenges

## What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is an approach to thinking that focuses on the long term and the interrelationships between human and natural systems. Fundamental to this approach is considering *how we meet our present needs while ensuring that future generations can continue to meet their needs*. Sustainability involves integrating social, economic and environmental considerations. Choosing the most sustainable approach implies that actions we take today will not degrade the quality of life in our communities or the natural systems that support them.

## What is a Sustainable Community?

A sustainable community is one that finds a balance between short-term and long-term perspectives. It recognizes the dynamic, complex and interdependent nature of systems. It focuses on community health and quality-of-life by:

- Protecting and restoring its natural environment,
- Understanding and shifting away from polluting and wasteful practices,
- Fostering citizen involvement and providing economic opportunity for its citizens.

## How to use this workbook

This workbook will help users think about key community challenges (topics) through a sustainability framework. It is divided into 5 topic areas that represent priority concerns for many communities. A similar approach could be used on many other topics unique to individual communities. Each topic area contains several questions, categorized into Environmental, Economic, and Social considerations.

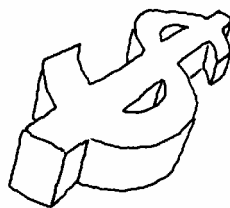
The group should work through these steps for each topic, based on their understanding of the topic.

1. Consider and record additional questions for the chosen topic (categorize the question as an environmental, economic or social consideration).
2. Think about how these questions might be answered considering the long-term (at least 20 years) and the interrelationship of issues (i.e., affordable housing to quality-of-life).
3. Discuss and record what new approaches could be used to address the topic.
4. Identify and discuss additional topics unique to the community

Repeat exercise for each of the 5 topics and/or additional community topics



Environmental



Economic



Social

# Affordable Housing

How can communities think about affordable housing in a more sustainable way?

## Environmental considerations

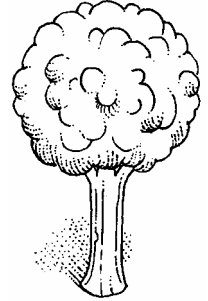
Example questions:

- Is the housing we build energy- and resource-efficient?
- Does the site and landscape around the housing enhance natural features and biodiversity?
- Is the housing designed to integrate with transportation options?

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## Economic considerations

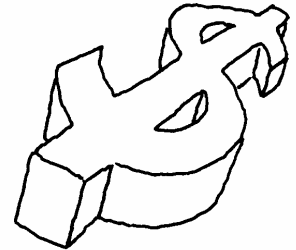
Example questions:

- Are materials and labor used to build the housing sourced locally?
- Will the housing be durable, easy to maintain and low cost to operate?
- Will the housing be close to job opportunities for the residents?

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## Social considerations

Example questions:

- Is the housing linked to community amenities and gathering places?
- Is the housing designed to encourage a sense of place and reflect income diversity?
- Does the housing reflect the values, cultural traditions, age distribution and historical elements of the geographic area?

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# Changing Demographics

How can communities think about changing demographics in a more sustainable way?

## Environmental considerations

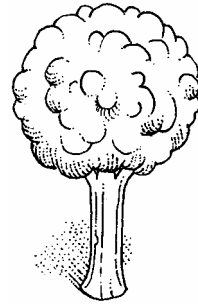
Example questions:

- How many people can the local water resources support long-term?
- What stresses does the human population impose on local ecosystems?
- Is there adequate wastewater treatment for the existing and future populations?

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## Economic considerations

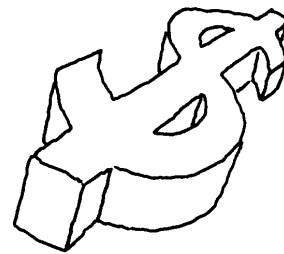
Example questions:

- Are there adequate economic opportunities to support current and future community members?
- Do the available economic opportunities provide a living wage to employees?
- Is there adequate population to support economic growth and provide a tax-base for community services?

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## Social considerations

Example questions:

- Is the average age of community members shifting?
- Are the relationships between members of differing ethnic, racial, religious and other groups positive?
- Is there a wide range of housing, employment, and recreation to meet shifting demographics?

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# Economic Development

How can communities think about economic development in a more sustainable way?

## Environmental considerations

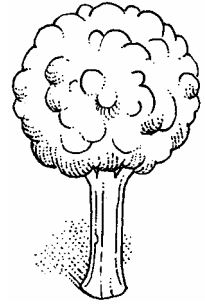
Example questions:

- Are local industries environmentally-responsible?
- Do the products and services produced in the community have a positive impact on the environment?
- Do facilities and operations pollute the local environment?

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## Economic considerations

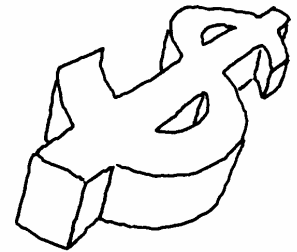
Example questions:

- Do new positions pay an adequate wage to support a quality standard of life?
- Do the community's jobs rely on local, renewable natural resources?
- Are subsidies required to encourage local economic development?

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## Social considerations

Example questions:

- Are new businesses recruited to be compatible with community plans and design?
- In what ways do the businesses invest in the community (i.e. source workforce locally, family friendly practices)?
- If seasonal labor is utilized, is there adequate support in the community for members of different cultures?

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# Physical Infrastructure

How can communities think about its physical infrastructure in a more sustainable way?

## Environmental considerations

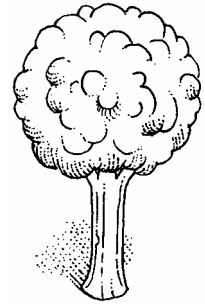
Example questions:

- Is wastewater being treated in the most long-term environmentally responsible way?
- Does placement of highways and roads cause unnecessary environmental degradation?
- Can alternatives to road salt and roadside herbicide treatments for weeds be used that are less harmful for the environment?

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## Economic considerations

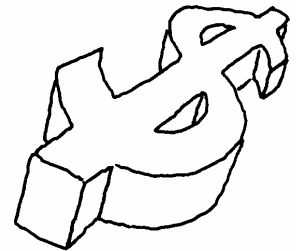
Example questions:

- Do fees for solid waste management reflect the real cost of transporting and managing waste?
- Is there “sharing” of services by communities to reduce cost?
- Are telecommunications services available at reasonable cost?

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## Social considerations

Example questions:

- Are local transportation systems designed to be pedestrian friendly, provide alternatives to the auto and promote community interaction?
- Is siting of solid waste management and wastewater facilities considered appropriate by community members?
- Does community provide life-long skills and learning opportunities to all?

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# Quality of Life

How can communities think about quality of life in a more sustainable way?

## Environmental considerations

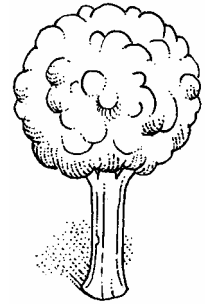
Example questions:

- Is there any system in place to measure changes in environmental quality in the community?
- Are there adequate greenways and open space to assure long-term stability of the local ecosystem?
- Is there a sustainable level of consumption of nonrenewable resources in the community?

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## Economic considerations

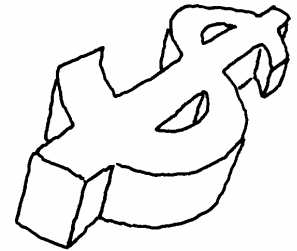
Example questions:

- Is there adequate job creation and economic opportunity for present and future generations?
- Is the work available in the community meaningful, rewarding, and does it pay a living wage?
- Are locally-owned businesses flourishing?

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## Social considerations

Example questions:

- Do citizens feel able to be meaningfully involved in decisions that will affect their future?
- Are there actions being conducted that will encourage a diverse range of citizens to feel a sense of belonging in the community?
- Do social structures and norms in the community promote a sense of citizenship and positive interactions between people?

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## **Additional Considerations (Questions)**

### **Affordable Housing**

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### **Changing Demographics**

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### **Economic Development**

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### **Physical Infrastructure**

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### **Quality of Life**

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## **Proposed Action Steps (focus on new approaches to topics)**

### **Affordable Housing**

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### **Changing Demographics**

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