



Wild at heart.

District of Elkford

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## **Communities Adapting to Climate Change October 14 – 15, 2009**

# **The District of Elkford Experience**

### ***Incorporating Climate Change initiatives into the Official Community Plan***

“An official community plan is a statement of objectives and policies to guide decisions on planning and land use management, within the area covered by the plan, respecting the purposes of local government.” Section 875, *Local Government Act*

In 2007 the District of Elkford had initiated the process to revise the Official Community Plan (OCP), when Columbia Basin Trust (CBT) announced its intention to support local governments with climate change adaptation planning. As the OCP is the document that guides community development considering the geographic landscape as well as community priorities, Elkford decided to incorporate the climate change adaptation work into the OCP revision. In addition, the Province legislated that communities include greenhouse gas emission reduction targets within the OCP, along with policies and actions to achieve those targets.

Elkford is a small municipality with limited capacity to take on multiple projects, therefore, it was imperative that the District streamline our processes to ensure we received value for the time, effort, and money expended. We also wanted to ensure we had a product that would be used by the municipality. As the OCP is a legislated document that requires that plans and actions of the local government align with the OCP, the District would need to work towards implementing the adaptation plans.



## **Process**

In 2008, the District issued a request for proposals to develop a new OCP for Elkford, incorporating climate change adaptation and mitigation policies and action plans. The District engaged Smart Growth Advisory Services to conduct the revision of the OCP. Smart Growth subcontracted some of the adaptation planning work to Zumundo Consulting. Once we had a clearly defined expectation from CBT, the District engaged Zumundo Consulting directly to complete the adaptation work and manage the interaction between the District and CBT.

In addition, the District received a grant from CAEE to incorporate climate change mitigation planning and engaged Zumundo Consulting to complete the mitigation and green house gas emission reduction targets to include in the OCP. Meredith Hamstead was subcontracted to facilitate the community involvement in the process.

The team of consultants engaged the community through a variety of methods; from kitchen table coffee sessions, to open houses, and information sessions in the local mall. The District also appointed a group of interested citizens to sit on an advisory committee.

We reviewed the significance of climate change globally, and considered how some of the global changes are expected to impact Elkford. Information presented from the CBT Advisory Committee and Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium (PCIC) was an important element of our process. It was interesting reviewing the changes to glaciers throughout the world. As some of Elkford's water system is supported by glacial melt, the global glacier melt has a local effect on Elkford. The Glaciers that feed the Elk River have not been monitored for retreat and their melt may have an impact on future water supply.

As we engaged the community in the climate change discussions, we did not focus on the cause of climate change. We focused the discussion on what is changing, and how those changes will impact Elkford. This was an important component of the community engagement. The Community has a keen awareness of the changes in the back country given the hunting and recreational activities of the valley. We focused on finding solutions for our community, and steered away from debating the causes of climate change. The industrial nature of the community, specifically Teck Coal Limited, meant the conversation was better focused on a resilient future, and the opportunities for adaptation.

The District received a climate change adaptation strategy report from Zumundo Consulting. The final mitigation and greenhouse gas reduction strategy report should be



available in the next few weeks. These reports, and the information within these reports, were incorporated into the draft OCP document.

The District is in the final stage of drafting the new OCP. We hope to have the the OCP to Council in the next month along with the final reports on adaptation and mitigation strategies. The target time line is to approve the first two readings of the bylaw and initiate the public hearing process before the end of the year.

The process to revise the OCP for Elkford has not been smooth sailing. Since initiating the project, three of six management employees moved on to other municipalities. In addition, Smart Growth Advisory Services ran into significant financial difficulty and terminated their contract to complete the OCP. The District has engaged Erin Welk, a former planner with Smart Growth, to complete the project for us. We will be able to complete the project in the next few months, within budget as well.

### **Key Learnings**

Incorporating climate change planning into our OCP was a significant learning experience for Elkford. We discussed that adaptation planning is probably more significant for local governments than mitigation planning, as adaptation planning is for the local situation, while mitigation planning is a global responsibility.

The District was working on or considering a few adaptation projects prior to the review of the OCP, such as a Wildfire Protection Plan and improving a dyke system to protect development that is within the flood plain. The adaptation project identified the need to act sooner rather than later on some issues, and identified a few issues that were not considered previously. Issues were prioritized by the public, Council and Staff, truly reflecting the needs of the community.

As the wildfire protection plan work is being completed, recommendations from the study are being implemented – such as maintaining road networks to provide fuel breaks and to allow easy access for fire fighting. A dyke study is underway, so that we can apply for grant funding when the next grant requests are solicited. The project also identified the need to map our aquifer. Water was identified as being the big unknown risk factor for the future. While the need to address future water issues is important, the District can take a bit more time to define and implement a study and subsequent actions.

Two of the stronger climate change related policy statements in the OCP are that



- Council shall act on opportunities to adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- Council shall consider climate change mitigation goals in all decisions.

We are discussing revising our standard request for decision documents that are submitted to Council, to include reference to the climate change elements.

In many ways, incorporating climate change planning into the OCP is a great opportunity. From Elkford's perspective, our previous OCP was lacking in a number of areas, so the OCP needed a complete rewrite. By combining the climate change planning into the OCP revision process, the discussion on the non climate change related OCP elements may have been glossed over. On the other hand, by combining the processes and rewriting the OCP using a climate change lens, all elements of the OCP revision considered climate change – either mitigation or adaptation. This provided a document with stronger linkages to climate change considerations than adding adaptation strategies, policies, and actions to an existing OCP.

The Official Community Plan *is* a community's plan for the future. A great OCP includes all elements of a community's future development and has the ability to more effectively guide the community's actions. As such, developing an OCP to include climate change planning is an important part of building a sustainable community.

Incorporating an adaptation plan into the OCP can be a daunting task for a small community, but can also provide great synergies. We intend to use the OCP as our strategic planning document that guides our five-year financial planning process. The OCP identifies numerous plans and actions that the District should be working on to implement climate change adaptation and mitigation plans, as well as social and other development goals. By focusing our attention on the OCP, the document will no longer be viewed as merely a land use planning document, but will be viewed as a true community plan.



## **Recommendations**

As you proceed with your own community climate change adaptation plan, we have a few recommendations to assist you with your process.

1. It is important that you understand what climate change means: globally and locally. There are elements of the global changes that will impact your community. You need to understand what these impacts are. If you are knowledgeable about the global situation, you will make better decisions locally. Spend a bit of time reviewing the data.
  2. Use the resources provided by the CBT Advisory Committee. The resources available through this group are exceptional. Their advice and guidance will assist you to build a better plan.
  3. Ensure that both staff and Council are involved in the project. You will need complete buy-in to be effective. If Council is only involved at the beginning and the end of the project, the recommendations may not be supported.
  4. Proceed slow and steady. At times it will feel like information overload. You will need time to digest the information, and feel comfortable with moving on to the next step. If you proceed too quickly, you may not be ready to adopt a policy document to implement changes.
  5. Commit to implementing the adaptation plan. Proceeding with action items will take time and a financial commitment. To ensure your plan doesn't just sit on a shelf, you need to be firmly committed to an implementation process.
  6. Start today. Use the Climate Change lens as you develop your plans for moving forward.
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