

Envisioning a Sustainable Future

Discussion Paper for Mahone Bay

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An ever-growing number of towns in Canada have chosen to revitalize their communities with sustainability as the key guiding principle. The example explored below is from a small town in Saskatchewan named Craik. It shares a number of similarities to Mahone Bay and also some differences, but as a model of a rural town, one hour from Saskatoon that had a desire and need to revitalize itself, the example can be very instructive.

In the 1970's a new highway by-passed the town and the big box stores that moved out to the highway contributed to the eventual loss of numerous retail stores and services in town. By 2001 the population had dwindled to just over 400 people, the local school was also having a difficult time filling classrooms.

In 2001 the town began working in partnership with other nearby towns and the rural municipality on a long-term plan for a sustainable community based project starting with a socio-economic profile/survey. Speakers were brought in to meet and discuss various topics. Amongst them was a retired professor whose idea of creating an "eco-village" was pitched first to this group and then to the town council. They decided to start with a demonstration building that could serve as a model of cutting edge green technologies and offer a place to hold workshops, seminars and other community activities. The Craik Sustainable Living Project is involved in 4 phases of this project:

- 1) Eco-Village: lots available for a nominal price to those who put forth proposals for homes that utilize green techniques
- 2) Eco-Centre: large multi-purpose building that is both demonstration site and community building with restaurant and rental space
- 3) Outreach and Education: curriculum for grades school, library on sustainable topics and climate change, Solar Fairs and trade shows based on sustainable living and green technologies
- 4) Community Action: competitions between local towns to meet the One Tonne Challenge, waste management alternatives, etc.

Over the last five years the town has managed to turn themselves around in very significant ways. They have welcomed 47 new families over the last year and a half! They have hosted fairs and trade shows and brought hundreds of people to their community to learn from their example. They have attracted a large-scale business that will build a factory for processing hemp and natural fibres using green technologies and thereby create dozens of new jobs. They have a chemical-free nine-hole golf course that attracts many players. They have received national and international coverage as a leading example of how a small community can thrive and benefit from the choices they have made together in envisioning their future.

For more information on Craik: <http://www.craikecovillage.ca/index.html>

FUNDING: Some sources of funding used by Craik and available for communities looking to build a sustainable future:

Green Municipal Fund: grants and low cost loans available for capital projects and sustainable community development needs. <http://sustainablecommunities.fcm.ca/GMF/>

EcoAction: funding for up to 50% of costs for projects that take positive action at community level. http://www.ec.gc.ca/ecoaction/what_is_e.html

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