

## **Sustainable Community Planning Series #2**

### **“Quality of Life in Canadian Communities: Growth, the Economy and the Urban Environment”**

Mary Shields  
Chair of EACoE

In February, EACoE introduced a new bi-monthly column on “Sustainable Community Planning”. In this second article, we will be exploring some interesting work being done by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities regarding “Quality of Life” indicators, and how they are relevant to planning for future growth in communities of all sizes.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM): Theme Report # 3\_The Quality of Life Report, produced in 2004, finds that, although a growing economy and increased population contribute to communities, they also have significant environmental consequences that must be managed and require a coordinated response by all orders of government. The report demonstrates the need for municipal, federal and provincial governments to work together to meet the challenges created by growth. Many of the challenges facing Canada’s cities and communities are part of larger problems that cannot be addressed by municipal governments alone.

The analysis relied on a framework FCM defined based on the understanding that quality of life is enhanced and reinforced in municipalities that do the following:

1. Develop and maintain a vibrant local economy;
2. Protect and enhance the natural and built environment;
3. Offer opportunities for the attainment of personal goals, hopes and aspirations;
4. Promote a fair and equitable sharing of common resources;
5. Enable residents to meet their basic needs; and
6. Support rich social interactions and the inclusion of all residents in community life.

Quality of life in any given municipality is influenced by interrelated issues concerning the state of affordable appropriate housing, civic engagement, community and social infrastructure, education, employment, the local economy, the natural environment, personal community health, personal financial security and personal safety.

#### ***Key Points in the Report:***

1. Physical growth is measured in terms of population, structures and land use, while economic growth is measured in terms of the value that can be quantified.
2. Tracking environmental and economic sustainability in cities in the context of quality of life reveals two fundamental prerequisites: a healthy environment and a healthy economy. Taking a sustainable development approach means finding the means to optimize both.

3. The benefits of sustainable development include vibrant, diversified economies, higher educational institutions, arts, cultural and recreational opportunities. On the other hand, continual growth stresses environment thereby reducing quality of life.
4. There is a direct relationship between the density of development in and around Canadian cities and pressures placed on the natural environment.
5. There needs to be a focus on intensification of neighbourhoods.
6. People need to be educated about the advantages of intensification, flush out fears and prejudice based on ignorance.

Municipalities responding to the indicators identified in the FCM report identified various policies and mechanisms that they had put in place, such as Official Plans, zoning by-laws and financial incentives, to encourage “smart” growth and enhance quality of life. All municipal governments need to develop policies to limit the expansion of development, reduce sprawl and to encourage more compact urban form.

The FCM Report notes that the environment and economy are so strongly linked that if local scale solutions are developed and shared among municipalities, the cumulative results will be felt nationally and globally.

In the previous Liberal Government, Environment Canada moved to establish a guiding policy based on a competitiveness and environmental sustainability framework. That was a direct recognition of the important link between a healthy natural environment and a vital economy. The current Federal Government also seems to be increasingly recognizing the importance of environmental sustainability and links to human health and prosperity and is beginning to introduce a variety of programs in this regard.

Looking at environmental, social, cultural and economic indicators together is an important strategy for addressing sustainability as a whole. An integrated perspective will encourage the search for integrated solutions. As the Town of Erin begins to plan for the future of its two largest communities through the Servicing and Settlement Master Plan process, Quality of Life indicators, such as those identified in the FCM report, can provide useful benchmarks to our local Council and the community at large.

For more information visit [www.fcm.ca](http://www.fcm.ca) and click on Quality of Life