

2004 BC COMMUNITIES AGENDA

The collective efforts of UBCM members have built the communities British Columbians call home. They have changed for the better the social fabric of this great province and through their advocacy beneficial change will continue. Since 1905 that advocacy on common issues has been promoted through the Union of BC Municipalities.

While each community has a unique character and vision, they also share common goals and objectives. The BC Communities Agenda identifies those common interests and defines steps needed to create and govern livable, viable and sustainable communities.

The 2004 BC Communities Agenda¹ is in two parts:

- 1. The Building Communities section addresses local government goals to foster communities that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable; and that are safe and secure, accessible and healthy.*
- 2. The Governing Communities section outlines local government goals to advance communities that are financially sustainable, have respectful intergovernmental relationships and a fair balancing of interests.*

The BC Communities Agenda also identifies specific actions on a primarily provincial scale that are needed for communities to reach their full potential. Other actions refer to the federal government role in community building.

Communities are the foundation of BC. They are the individual units that embody the whole – the Province. The strength of our communities will determine the strength of our province. With the proper framework and support from the provincial and federal governments, communities can thrive and flourish.

The BC Communities Agenda focuses on:

- government actions that are needed today to support sustainable communities from a local government perspective;*
- the relationships that are needed between governments to allow communities to reach their potential.*

Sustainability is the goal – and the provincial and federal governments have a key role in activities in and around communities.

¹ From time to time, part of the policy portion of the UBCM Convention is devoted to updating and expanding the BC Communities Agenda. These priorities are largely based on UBCM policy positions. See the Appendix for a list of source documents.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

1. Economically Sustainable Communities

The economic sustainability of our province depends on the vitality and strength of BC communities. To ensure that our communities are economically strong and vibrant, there are an array of policy initiatives that will facilitate local economic growth and development.

Initiatives that would support this goal include:

- working with communities to capitalize on the economic opportunities associated with major international events, such as 2010, and ensuring that these opportunities are shared by all communities.
- completing land and resource management plans for all areas of the province; ensuring that existing land use plans are current and representative of the region's goals and objectives; and establishing the forest designations throughout the province.
- developing policies that will provide affordable, secure and reliable energy sources.
- ensuring that Crown lands management is reflective of community interests and that competing interests are satisfactorily addressed.
- implementing acceptable forest certification programs.
- engaging in provincial, national and international market campaigns to promote BC forest products, as well as programs to support the development of new products and new markets for BC products.
- supporting community diversification by developing policies that promote arts, culture, heritage and tourism, as well as building on existing resource strengths through value-added initiatives and secondary manufacturing.
- supporting transition strategies for single-industry/resource-dependent communities severely impacted by changes in the resource sector and ensuring that funds and programs are available to displaced workers.
- ensuring that communities are consulted and engaged as the provincial government moves to: develop alternative energy sources (e.g. IPP, wind, etc.); streamline existing permitting and licensing processes (e.g. oil and gas) and restructure existing energy systems (BC Hydro).
- supporting community involvement in local resource management through the expansion of community forests, promoting local government-First Nations partnerships and other initiatives that foster community involvement.
- establishing a provincial resource revenue sharing program that would financially acknowledge the services and other associated costs incurred by local governments to support the natural resource sector of this province.
- resolving international trade disputes, such as softwood lumber, and ensuring that communities are consulted on provincial, national and international policy matters that will directly affect their local economy (e.g. on-shore priority for fish processing, Pacific salmon treaty, international trade agreements).

2. Socially Sustainable Communities

Fostering diversity, accessibility and respect are key community social goals.

Initiatives that would assist local governments in achieving these goals include:

- taking measures to support affordable housing as well as housing and support services for seniors in their communities.
- Providing resources to address social problems associated with homelessness, drug, alcohol and gambling addictions; and respecting local government input into related provincial initiatives.

- supporting partnerships and agreements that build effective working relationships between local governments and social service organizations, business, labour and First Nations.
- fostering the construction, maintenance and operation of cultural, leisure and recreational facilities in communities.
- providing adequate funding to maintain a high quality of education and associated facilities in communities.
- promoting best practices and success stories for the benefit of all communities.

3. Environmentally Sustainable Communities

Communities must have the tools required to responsibly manage their own impacts on the environment and must be assured that the community interest in a healthy and sustainable environment is protected by the actions of others, including the policies of other agencies.

Initiatives that would support this goal include:

- encouraging governments to work together to develop integrated environment management approaches that meet their respective interests and the objectives of a sustainable environment. Areas that would benefit from an inter-jurisdictional approach include, but are not limited to: climate change, species at risk management, invasive plant control, fire hazard management, fish protection, contaminated sites development, safe drinking water and groundwater, solid and liquid waste management.
- protecting the quantity and quality of surface water and ground water supplies.
- providing local government with adequate tools and resources to support land development strategies and standards that contribute to environmental protection and liveable communities.
- supporting local government actions to manage weeds and pests, including reliable pest management on neighbouring provincial and federal lands.
- provincial support and funding for flood hazard management protection programs.
- supporting the local government response to air quality and climate change, including the promotion of community energy planning and provincial initiatives to minimize energy consumption and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- ensuring community watersheds, groundwater and drinking water are not negatively impacted by resource and tourism development on Crown lands.

4. Safe and Secure Communities

Safety and security are key community values and community safety is a shared responsibility. Local governments are doing their part but they need assistance from both the provincial and federal governments.

Initiatives that would support this goal include:

- supporting community-based policing and crime prevention programs.
- supporting community-based justice alternatives, such as drug courts, healing circles and other alternative justice models.
- providing equitable and accountable financing of police services.
- working with local government to ensure it has the tools to enforce bylaws that protect public health and safety, including an expansion of the number of bylaw adjudication forums and improved fine collection systems.
- providing local government with the tools necessary to address the social problems and risks to the community resulting from criminal activity.

- ensuring that local government services provided to the federal and provincial justice system (e.g. keep of prisoners, delivery of criminal documents, criminal investigations, etc.) are fairly compensated.
- providing for the delivery of justice services (e.g. court services, police services, etc.) close to communities.
- supporting the acceleration of emergency preparedness measures in light of increased threats, such as wildfires and the West Nile virus.

5. Connected Communities

Access to various modes of transportation (road, air, rail and water) and access to telecommunication technology is imperative to our sustainability. The infrastructure that facilitates accessibility within and between communities is key to a community's economic health and quality of life.

Initiatives that would support this goal include:

- securing stable support for public transportation, including a federal tax exemption for employer-provided transit benefits and increased provincial contributions for transit.
- recognizing and supporting regional airports as an integral part of the transportation system.
- providing for safe, reliable highway systems, and ensuring that the BC Ferries service is recognized as an integral part of the provincial highway system.
- ensuring that all communities have access to a basic level of telecommunication and internet services, and working to connect BC communities through leading edge information technology.

6. Healthy Communities

Health care facilities and services that are accessible, available and accountable, as well as effective health promotion programs are essential for a healthy community.

Initiatives that foster healthy communities include:

- reinvigorating models of healthy communities that promote good health outcomes from decision making across governments and that maintain community-based programs.
- supporting mechanisms for community input into regional Health Authorities and ensuring meaningful consultation with local governments on proposed changes to the health system – allowing for the full consideration of impacts on local residents and local governments.
- establishing and maintaining effective communication and coordination mechanisms between Regional Hospital Districts and Health Authorities.
- meeting the health care needs of rural and remote communities – making services available and accessible.
- helping small and rural communities retain and enhance a broader range of health professionals and specialist physicians in their communities.
- supporting local governments working in partnership with provincial and federal governments to address urgent health care challenges as they arise, including nursing shortages and the recruitment of health professionals.
- supporting disease prevention and health promotion programs, including smoking regulations that protect the health and safety of employees and the public in workplaces.

GOVERNING COMMUNITIES

7. Financially Sustainable Communities

Communities need reliable revenue sources that provide local governments with a secure and viable financial base.

Initiatives that would support this goal include:

- ensuring that communities have access to a predictable, stable and secure source of provincial revenues that will allow them to provide essential services (e.g. revenue sharing, traffic fine revenues, etc.).
- ensuring that no downloading of provincial responsibilities occurs without appropriate funding (as set out under the *Community Charter*).
- providing access to new revenue sources in order to reduce local government's reliance on property taxes.
- taking measures to maintain the stability of the property tax and assessment systems, in consultation with local government.
- addressing local government needs with respect to financing costs associated with new development.
- requiring that Crown corporations pay the full equivalent of property taxes.
- ensuring that small communities continue to receive core financial support and guidance.
- establishing a permanent federal-provincial-local government infrastructure funding program.

8. Respectful Governance Relationships

Achieving intergovernmental relationships that are founded on respect between local governments and provincial, federal, and First Nations governments is a goal shared by all BC communities.

Initiatives that would support this goal include:

- respecting and adhering to local government bylaws.
- respecting local government views regarding provincial and federal policy, including the requirement for notice and consultation provisions.
- maintaining a legislative framework that recognizes and reflects local government as an autonomous, responsible and accountable order of government across all statutes.
- recognizing that a respectful government relationship also applies between local governments.
- recognizing that one size does not fit all – communities must have the freedom to meet their citizens' needs and their unique responsibilities within the bounds of local capacity and resources.
- including affected local government interests in decision making on restructuring.
- supporting initiatives that promote effective working relationships between First Nations and local governments.
- ensuring local government involvement in treaty negotiations so that community interests are represented in the process and productive relationships are built with First Nations governments post-treaty.

9. Fair Balancing of Community Interests

A community emerges when individuals agree to form a corporate entity and set aside certain individual interests for the greater good of all. Individuals also agree to put their trust in others to make decisions for the common good. When there are conflicts, the entire community's rights and responsibilities should be clearly defined.

Initiatives that support the fair balancing of community interests include:

- recognizing that local governments are responsible for their actions but should not be responsible for the actions of others (e.g. building regulation liability).
- establishing a rule of proportionate liability and a 10-year ultimate limitation period.
- encouraging healthy public debate but protecting local elected officials from intimidation when they speak their minds in the conduct of their office (SLAPP suits).

Sources for the 2004 BC Communities Agenda

The BC Communities Agenda is based largely on existing UBCM resolutions and Policy Papers and is intended to be an integration of the key elements contained within these documents. Some of the recent source documents are:

Statement of General Policies of the UBCM

2001

Special Resolution on Consideration of Cooperation Agreements

Special Resolution on Softwood Lumber Countervailing Duty

Special Resolution on Air Quality Improvements

Energy Forum Recommendations

2002

Special Resolution on Consultation and Downloading

Special Resolution on Transportation

Response to Community Charter

Policy Paper on Civil Liability

Policy Paper on Forest Policy

Environment Action Plan

Energy Policy Digest

MOU on Treaty Negotiations

2003

Special Resolution on Liability

Special Resolution on Tourism and Air Transportation

Special Resolution on Liquor Licensing Policy

Policy Paper: New Environmental Legislation: Impacts and Implications for Local Government