

Sustainability: The Green Thread

On Friday, April 22, we celebrate Earth Day. This is a time to reflect on what we as individuals, organizations and communities can do to protect and preserve our environment. As I have said many times over the past few years, protecting the environment must be a priority. The challenge for us in Ladysmith – for Council and for all of us as individuals -- is to find ways to look after the natural environment while building a sustainable community with real, lasting opportunity for current and future generations.

We have a solid foundation to build on. The Town's list of sustainability and environmental accomplishments over the past decade is truly impressive (you can see it on our website at www.ladysmith.ca/sustainability-green-living/town-initiatives).

Council has just adopted a new set of strategic priorities that line up with our Sustainability Vision and position us to move forward to build a sustainable future for our citizens. We will encourage investments to attract new businesses and industries to our community, ones that align with our sustainability objectives. We will help to develop a positive business environment that contributes to our quality of life. We are committed to maintaining and improving our infrastructure to meet current and future needs in a way that protects our water sources and the natural environment that surrounds us.

Later this year, we will complete the new, state-of-the art sewage treatment plant that will treat our sewage and waste water to the secondary treatment level. This is an important step to help ensure the future health of Ladysmith Harbour. I am particularly pleased with the progress being made by the Ladysmith Watersheds Roundtable. I believe strongly in any grassroots initiative involving community members, concerned citizens and dedicated organizations working together as equals with a common goal. I am excited to see what this group can accomplish together to protect our precious watershed. In the meantime, Council will continue to reduce the amount of water the Town uses, and work with our citizens to meet the community target of using 20 per cent less water than the published Canadian single family consumption rate by 2018.

Ladysmith is recognized as a leader in sustainability. We are justifiably proud of being the first community in the Cowichan Valley Regional District to introduce curbside recycling pickup (in 2003), and the first in B.C. to bring in curbside organics collection (in 2006). The Town has been recognized as one of Canada's Greenest Employers for four years in a row. However, it isn't enough to rest on our reputation. There is much more that we can all do, individually, and together, as individuals and as organizations. I was personally disappointed recently to find out that too much of Ladysmith's recycling is 'contaminated' – that is, we are putting things in our recycling bags that don't belong. I understand and share your frustration that we can no longer put 'film' plastic out with our recycling. We all felt as though we were taking a step backwards when we found out film plastics were no longer acceptable in the curbside recycling. Council, along with local governments across our province, will continue to work for a solution to that. But in the meantime, I hope that residents of Ladysmith will be more vigilant about what you put out for recycling, more creative about finding alternatives to using film plastics

(such as reusable shopping bags) and more diligent about taking materials to your local recycling depot and the Peerless Road Recycling Centre. One easy way to deal with your film plastics is to save them up and return them with your regular 'deposit' cans and bottles. We will be enclosing a flyer in the upcoming utility bill to help in these efforts -- keep it handy!

Another significant environmental challenge for Council is the threat posed by the derelict and abandoned vessels in Ladysmith Harbour. We are lobbying senior governments hard to take action on this front, and in the meantime we are also working with partners such as the Ladysmith Maritime Society and Stz'uminus First Nation to find local solutions to the challenges in the harbour. The environmental hazard is compounded by the risks to our tourism and shellfish industries. While I am frustrated at the lack of action taken to date by senior governments, I am hopeful that our efforts are supported by our local Member of Parliament, First Nations, and other organizations.

While we know that we need to protect and preserve our natural environment, we also know that development and growth are inevitable and, when properly done, desirable. It is Council's job to ensure that growth is managed and development is responsible. We recently reviewed the development plans for the new Holland Creek Development and were unanimous in our concern for protecting the Arbutus Hump in the middle of the proposed development. We have asked the developers to change their plan to ensure that the development boundary respects the natural topography and protects a greater portion of the Arbutus Hump as park. This is the kind of development that will help ignite economic growth in Ladysmith. By listening to the community and working with developers, we can promote growth that fits our shared vision and lays a solid founding for our future.

I hope you will take part in the Earth Day activities on April 22 this year, as we celebrate and renew our commitment to protecting our planet, not just on Earth Day, but every day of the year.

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