

“Sustainability is about ensuring the long-term well-being of the planet, people, and economy. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Take Action for Sustainable Huron

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability has become a household word, but what exactly does it mean? One commonly used definition is from the 1987 *Our Common Future* report (Brundtland Report) which defines sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This definition points out several key ideas:

- Sustainability is recognizing how intricately linked are our economy, our society, and our environment;
- Sustainability is focusing on what we can do locally while recognizing global connections; and
- Sustainability is working together to make wise decisions about our future.



Ultimately, sustainability is about ensuring the long-term well-being of the planet, people and economy.

It is important to realize that sustainability is not an end-goal to be checked off a list as “done”. Instead, sustainability is a *way of thinking and doing* that needs to become a part of everyone’s day-to-day life:

- **For individuals**– sustainability means thinking differently about our habits and their consequences. It is about becoming more aware and living better – not living without.
- **For communities**– sustainability means being connected, self-sufficient and resourceful in order to cope with change.
- **For the County**– sustainability calls for community engagement, informed decision making, and the integration of sustainability principles into everyday business.

Why does Huron County need a Sustainability Plan?

We face many pressures in the 21st century—climate change, shifting global markets, rising oil prices, demographic change, biodiversity loss, and food security to name a few. These global pressures have local consequences, which can be made even more challenging by the rural nature of our Huron County community. This means we are facing things like severe weather events, out-migration of youth in search of better job opportunities, and lack of access to services because of transportation distances.

If we want to improve our quality of life in Huron County, we need to make sure our communities can handle, bounce back from and thrive in the face of any shocks or events – what is often referred to as *building the resiliency* of our communities. For this to happen we need supportive communities, a strong economy, and a healthy environment. Sustainability planning is how we can work towards this goal.

A Sustainability Plan starts from a common vision formed by the community and builds on a community's existing strengths. It is about connections; looking at the challenges in our economy, society and environment *together* as opposed to treating them as independent problems. It co-ordinates existing municipal plans under an over-arching umbrella – not replacing them, but making sure everything works towards the common vision. And it involves everyone in Huron County doing their part together to reach our vision. The final product is a plan *for* Huron County's future made *by* the Huron County community. The benefits of sustainability planning include:

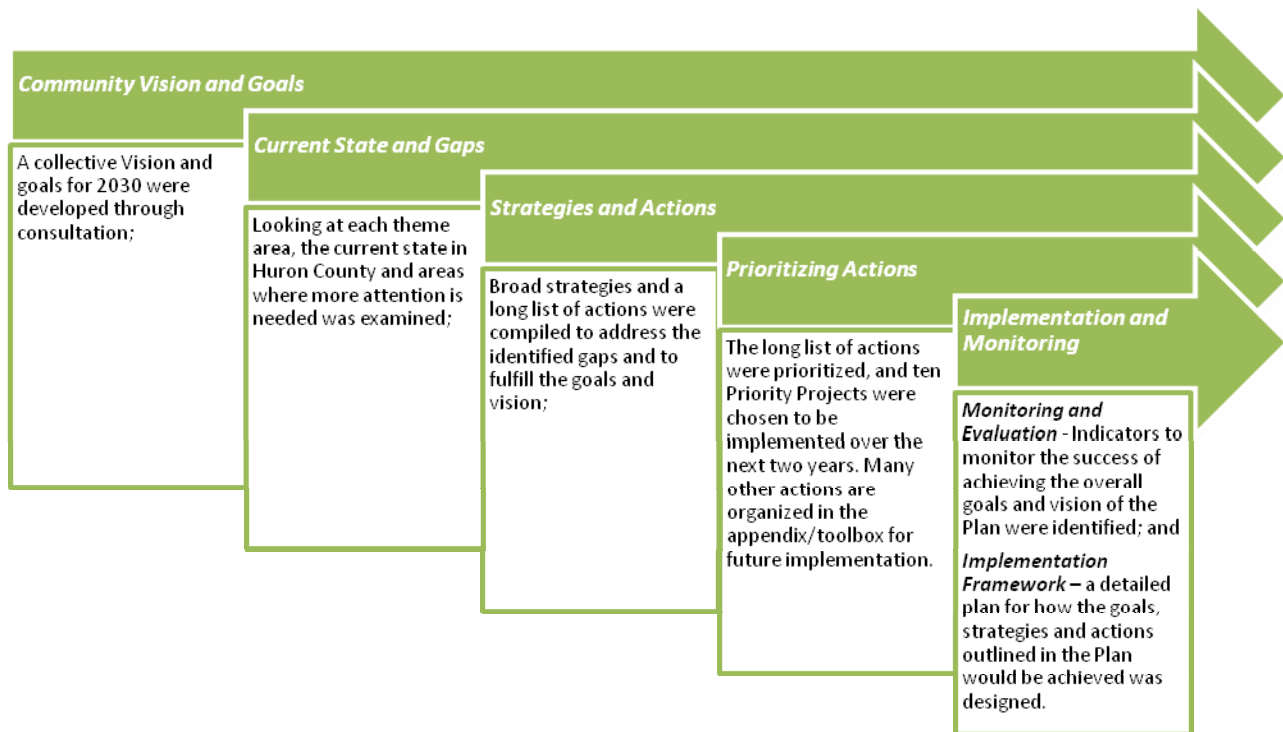
- Having a clear long-term vision;
- Strengthening economic vitality and social security;
- Improving our self-sufficiency;
- Protecting and restoring our natural assets;
- Minimizing our ecological footprint;
- Attracting great talent and building healthy communities;
- Empowering people through participation and leadership;
- Promoting environmentally sound technology and business;
- Promoting good governance; and
- Attracting funding.

Building our Plan

The Huron County Sustainability Plan was developed through a year-long community-based collaborative process starting in 2010. The process was guided by a Steering Committee made up of representatives with expertise in each of the priority theme areas identified in the *Take Action* report.

Key Stages

The development of Huron County’s Sustainability Plan started with the 10 Theme Areas from *Take Action*. Five key steps were involved:



Early Win Projects

Three “Early Win” projects were launched at start of the Sustainability Plan development process. These projects were selected for their ability to build community momentum about planning for our sustainable future, and to showcase sustainability in action. The projects were chosen from the *Take Action* report based on potential benefits to the community, ability to complete in a short time frame, degree of overlap with multiple sustainability goals, and partnership opportunities. The achievements to date from each Early Win projects are featured throughout this Sustainability Plan.

- The School Yard Planting Project: Page 13
- The Food Enterprise Opportunities Project: Page 24
- The Manufacturing Efficiencies Project: Page 32

Selection of the Priority Projects

Out of the full list of future actions to carry out under the Sustainability Plan, a number of priority projects were chosen for implementation over the next two years. These projects are in areas that need priority attention, are the first step to carrying out other actions in the plan, or will help raise awareness about adopting sustainable principles into our work, home and play.

The Priority Projects were selected by the Steering Committee through a rigorous review of the full list of actions, using the following criteria:

- Overlap across theme areas;
- Builds on or complements existing initiatives;
- Availability of partners to carry out the action;
- Will achieve major progress in two years;
- Availability of funding;
- Community interest and support;
- Opportunities for raising awareness about sustainability; and
- Creates momentum for implementing the sustainability plan.

Theme Areas from *Take Action*

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) Economy | 6) Natural Environment |
| 2) Transportation | 7) Population |
| 3) Agriculture | 8) Downtowns |
| 4) Energy | 9) Community Needs |
| 5) Liveable Communities | 10) Healthy Active Communities |

A Conversation about Sustainability

Participation in the development of the Sustainability Plan was extensive, with the perspectives of hundreds of Huron County community members and organizations contributing to the final plan. Individuals and groups engaged in the process included: County Council, local municipalities, businesses, agricultural groups, tourism industry, heritage associations, environmental groups, community groups, the general public including youth and seniors, residents at large and tourists.

These groups and individuals participated in developing the plan and were informed of progress at key stages through:

- “Places and Spaces” conversations - where we set up a booth at fall fairs and other community events and spoke with community members;
- Social media – such as Twitter, Facebook, and the Sustainable Huron Blog;
- Sustainable Huron Newsletter;
- Questionnaires distributed from our Sustainable Huron booth;
- An on-line survey;
- Steering Committee meetings;
- Working sessions;
- Presentations to municipalities and specific stakeholder groups; and
- Public forums.

To raise awareness and excitement among young people in Huron County about sustainability and Huron’s Sustainability Plan, an Art Contest was held in 2010. Through schools and public announcements, youth were invited to submit a piece of art representing their vision of a Sustainable Huron. The contest winner was Jasmine DeBoer from Central Huron High School who submitted her photograph (below).



Jasmine DeBoer, Youth Contest Entry

Our Vision

A Community for Generations

This vision was adopted from the County of Huron Corporate Strategy because it fits so well with the objectives of Sustainable Huron. It recognizes the hard work and successes of past generations who laid the foundations for the present, it embodies the work we must tackle now to leave a strong legacy for those that follow, and it creates hope for future residents and descendants. The community includes all present generations – young, old, in-between, and newcomers. And finally, this vision underscores the creativity of Huron residents to rise to the challenge of securing its future by addressing needs, working together, and building resiliency.

Our Mission

Huron County is a vibrant and forward thinking community, taking action for a sustainable and prosperous future.

This mission is our “marching orders.” It recognizes the diversity of skills and talents within Huron’s people, and emphasizes the community’s desire to look ahead and take action to shape tomorrow, rather than allow it to shape us. A sustainable future is a more prosperous one.



Sustainability Principles

Ensuring that Huron’s sustainability plan is implemented the following organizational design principles were determined:

- **Recognizes:** the interdependence and importance of environmental, economic and social health in creating a vibrant and prosperous future for all in Huron County
- **Promotes:** our commitment to actions locally and thinking globally
- **Values:** our natural environment, strong communities, and economic forces that make Huron a truly unique and wonderful place to live, work, and play
- **Engages:** all people (residents and visitors), businesses, community groups, service clubs, industry associations, social organizations, schools, government and industries in the conversation around sustainability
- **Emphasizes:** community awareness, education, and involvement
- **Integrates:** our many great initiatives to ensure that we are working together and sharing resources where appropriate
- **Innovates:** with made-in-Huron County solutions that respond to the unique challenges that we face
- **Provides:** future generation with access to the same or better resources and quality of life than is available today
- **Achieves:** long term well-being for the social, economic, and environment in Huron County



Jasmine DeBoer, Youth Contest Entry