

CITY OF VICTORIA
Committee of the Whole Report

Date: April 20, 2009 **From:** Mark Hornell, Project Manager

Subject: Victoria Sustainability Framework – Options for Next Steps

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek direction on next steps for the Victoria Sustainability Framework (VSF) project. Separate corporate and stakeholder workshops focused on goal priority-setting were held on March 2 and 3, 2009 respectively. Participant feedback on the corporate workshop was generally positive, whereas participant feedback on the stakeholder workshop was more mixed, with lower overall positive ratings. The project team, which participated in both workshops, came to similar conclusions and requested the consultants prepare recommendations for next steps in light of this experience. These perceptions, combined with a significantly changed policy and administrative context since the project was initiated in summer 2008, provides an opportunity to pause, take stock, and consider options for moving forward. Issues identified relate to:

- Confidence in the process.
- Validity of the goals currently defined.
- Validity of the priorities identified at the workshop.
- Changed context for the project.
- Defining and resourcing a supportable and effective process.

The project team believes – on the basis of the workshop experience but also given the changed policy and administrative context established by Council - that neither Council nor community stakeholders have the necessary confidence in the process as it stands, to continue with the original project plan. The project team and consultants conclude that steps need to be taken to raise both understanding and build buy-in before we can move forward effectively. In discussion of the issues and options, directors concluded that it would be most prudent for Council to assign leadership of the project to the new Director of Sustainability, who can work with the interdepartmental project team to develop a process for the next stage of the project as an immediate priority.

Recommendation:

That Council assigns leadership of the Victoria Sustainability Framework project to the Director of Sustainability and requests the director to bring forward a process for the next phase of project as an immediate priority.

Respectfully submitted,

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek direction on next steps for the Victoria Sustainability Framework (VSF) project.

2. Background

When complete, the Victoria Sustainability Framework will:

1. define a strategic vision including goals and priorities to guide the City's corporate and community activities toward long-term sustainability;
2. provide tools to integrate a commitment to sustainability into City operations, policy and program initiatives; and,
3. create mechanisms for tracking progress towards sustainability goals.

The Victoria Sustainability Framework will provide a high-level policy umbrella to guide all City business, including corporate and community policy initiatives such as the Corporate Strategic Plan and the Official Community Plan, business planning and budgeting, and ongoing operations and service delivery.

Project tasks completed to date include:

- A high-level scan of City documents and a best practice review of sustainability frameworks;
- Staff and community consultation on a draft sustainability commitment and themes/subthemes/goals including: initial workshop with key City staff, an online opinion survey, a telephone survey, online youth forum, and public and staff drop-in sessions (October 2008 – January 2009);
- Council approval in principle of a draft sustainability commitment statement and sustainability goals in four theme areas (February 5, 2009);
- Development of a draft set of corporate and community indicators and baseline measures; and,
- Preparation of a draft inventory of City policies, programs and initiatives related to sustainability.

Separate corporate and stakeholder workshops that focused on goal priority-setting were held on March 2 and 3, 2009 at the Ambrosia Event Centre. Approximately 40 staff and councilors attended the corporate workshop on March 2nd. Approximately 55 community stakeholders, plus councilors attending on March 3rd, along with a limited number of staff members serving a resource role. Participant comments on the corporate workshop were generally positive, whereas feedback on the stakeholder workshop was more mixed, with lower ratings received particularly with regard to session organization, meeting expectations, and overall rating (Attachment A). The project team came to similar conclusions and requested the consultants prepare recommendations on next steps in light of this experience (Attachment B). These perceptions, combined with a significantly changed policy and administrative context since the project was initiated in summer 2008, provides an opportunity to pause, take stock, and consider options for moving forward more effectively.

3. Issues

- Confidence in the process.
- Validity of the goals currently defined.
- Validity of the priorities identified at the workshop.
- Changed context for the project.
- Defining and resourcing a supportable and effective process.

4. Analysis

4.1 Confidence in the process

The current consultant project scope, budget and timeline allowed for only limited stakeholder engagement. Feedback received from the single stakeholder workshop indicated that this provided insufficient opportunity for community stakeholder participants to understand the work already completed, discuss and confirm the goals defined, and position the workshop priority-setting exercise within the scope of the overall VSF project. Community stakeholders were largely unfamiliar with the project with some learning about it for the first time. Cancellation of an initially proposed October community stakeholder workshop on goal setting, which conflicted with the municipal election period (and which was replaced by public and staff coffee-talk drop-ins), missed an opportunity to engage workshop participants at the start of the project. By not providing or rescheduling this opportunity, community stakeholders neither understood the overall process, nor felt any commitment to the goals that had been refined through the broader community consultation process in December 2008, thereby undermining the effort to identify areas of short-term concern. In hindsight, the half-day workshop format tried to do too much in too short a time frame leading to frustration on the part of participants, and a sense that involvement was merely tokenism. This was less of a problem with the corporate workshop, involving as it did City staff familiar with the project and its scope. Most City staff had participated in the initial corporate goal setting workshop held in October 2008.

Many stakeholders expressed frustration with discussion on goals and the desire to move directly to action planning. Action planning, although a logical part of the overall VSF project, falls outside the current consultant contract scope. Stakeholders are passionate about Victoria's sustainability and want more opportunity than the compressed format of the workshop afforded, to share their experiences and initiatives and contribute to the identification of workable actions to move the City's sustainability agenda forward. Stakeholder confidence in the process has been undermined and needs to be restored to move the project forward effectively. Additional efforts to work with stakeholders to review and understand the work to date, coupled with a commitment by the City to engage stakeholders in an action planning phase, could help restore confidence in the VSF process.

4.2 Validity of the goals currently defined

Many stakeholders seem to feel that the framework end-state goals as currently stated, neither adequately capture the scope of issues facing the City, nor are sufficiently compelling to inspire action. This perception may have been reduced had there been more time at the workshop for

a full explanation and discussion of the goals and response to questions raised. Misconceptions about the framework could have been effectively addressed, for example regarding the necessity for indicators and targets for the goals (both of which will be part of the VSF). Other participants noted that the goals, in covering several topics, lose clarity and power to inspire action. Although the project team feels that the goals do not need wholesale revision, the City will need to take time to enable all participants to fully understand the goals, make them more clear and compelling, and clarify their role in the overall framework process, before the project can move forward with confidence that the goals are valid and enjoy broad support.

4.3 Validity of the priorities identified at the March workshops

The two workshops aimed to identify short-term priority goals as an interim step to help the consultant team focus their research on best practices for potential immediate action items, with action planning for the balance of the goals to follow. The two workshops identified quite different sets of priority goals (Attachment C). The March 2nd workshop gave priority to corporate goals related to: response and recovery; transportation, energy and air contaminants; revenue; infrastructure; and health care and wellness. The March 3rd workshop gave priority to community goals related to: mobility; poverty; housing affordability; community engagement; land development; downtown and harbour; local food supply; and, transportation, energy and air contaminants. The project team observed inconsistency in the application of the priority-setting methodology and noted the lack of sufficient time to complete discussion. The project team concluded that the workshops did not provide a reliable reading on goal priority, in particular, for the community goals. Staff participants did not have the opportunity in the first workshop to consider the community goals, which meant that stakeholder perceptions of priority lacked the benefit of full staff insight into these City business areas. Feedback received made clear that many participants were uncomfortable with prioritizing goals, and that a preferred approach would be to define actions across the goal spectrum. A commitment to undertake a full action planning phase, that would prioritize actions according to clear and consistent criteria that were developed and affirmed beforehand, could help to address these concerns.

4.4 Changed context for the project

The policy and administrative context for the VSF project has changed considerably since the project was initiated by the previous council in the summer 2008. Council has defined new priorities and has confirmed its commitment to sustainability by establishing the new Department of Sustainability. The new City Manager and new Director of Sustainability will bring a fresh perspective to the initiative. Finally a new governance structure has been established, with a priority placed on effective community engagement, including development of a corporate engagement strategy set to begin shortly. These changes indicate that the current process, consultant-driven with limited consultation and a relatively tight timeline may not be well-aligned with Council's priority for community engagement and commitment to sustainability. As well, given the degree of stakeholder interest in more complete engagement, a more robust process than initially considered may be required.

4.5 Defining and resourcing a supportable and effective process

The VSF project to date has been moving forward to a strict timeline, relying on part-time staff involvement and targeted council and community participation, with the intention of completing a final framework for Council's approval by June 2009. High level strategic projects of this sort done by other local governments, even those that rely on consultants to undertake much of the work, generally have at least one staff member dedicated to lead the project on a full-time basis. As well, other successful sustainability visioning and framework development processes rely to a much greater degree on the active participation of Council, community partners and stakeholders either through task forces or robust consultation exercises. An expedited process runs the risk of weak support and commitment to its outcomes, with the potential that additional work to address perceived process shortcomings would have to occur later.

5. Options

The project team has identified the following options for moving forward in light of the issues discussed:

5.1 Complete the process as currently defined.

<u>Pro:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completes project within current budget and timeline.
<u>Con:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of buy-in runs the risk of discrediting the outcomes and possibly having to re-do the work, with timeline implications for dependant projects such as the Official Community Plan (OCP) update.

5.2 Reconfirm goals and intent with Council and stakeholders and immediately launch a participatory task force process.

<u>Pro:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gains both Council and stakeholder understanding and commitment to revised/refined goals.• Focuses further community involvement through action-oriented task forces aimed at short term wins.• Broader long-term community and partner ownership of the project with wider potential reach.
<u>Con:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More staff /consultant time required to manage task force process.• Longer time frame to generate final framework may delay moving forward on dependent projects such as the OCP update.

5.3 Assign leadership of the project to the Director of Sustainability and request development of a process for the project's next phases as an immediate priority.

<u>Pro:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicated full-time staff group to coordinate and lead the process.• Perception of a fresh start by a specialist in the field.• Gains both council and stakeholder understanding and commitment to revised/refined goals.• Focuses further community involvement through action-oriented task forces aimed at short term wins.• Broader long-term community and partner ownership of the project with wider potential reach.
<u>Con:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of time and momentum.

5.4 Divide the project and continue to advance on the corporate goals, while holding off on the community goals until the Director of Sustainability is on staff.

<u>Pro:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintains momentum on corporate sustainability agenda.• Perception of a fresh start by a specialist in the field for community goals.
<u>Con:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of time and momentum on the community goals.• Lack of opportunity for broader input into the corporate sustainability agenda.• Lack of opportunity for discussion and evaluation of goal differences between community and corporate participants.• Loss of coordinated approach between corporate and community parts of the framework

6. Resource Impacts

All options would have some level of resource impact, primarily in terms of staff time, with the exception of option 5.1, which would proceed according to the current timeline and budget.

7. Conclusions

The concerns identified regarding the March 3rd stakeholder workshop underline the importance of defining and resourcing the remainder of the process in a way that reinforces the confidence of Council, and ensures that project outcomes garner solid community support. The project team believes – on the basis of the workshop experience but also given the changed policy and administrative context established by Council - that neither Council nor community stakeholders have full confidence in the process as it stands, and that steps need to be taken to raise both understanding and build buy-in before we can move forward effectively. At the very least, a workshop with Council is needed to confirm Council's intent and understanding of the project, expectations with regard to process and outcomes, and perhaps validation of the goals either in their present or revised form. Council direction on the scope and purpose of subsequent stakeholder engagement is also necessary.

The project team believes that we are close with the goals and that additional time spent discussing them openly with Council and stakeholders, in a spirit that confirms that they are open to improvement, may result in a refined set of goals that may not differ greatly from those we have now, but which will have broader buy-in and support. As well, the project team believes that it would be more productive, and engage broader community interest and involvement, to abandon the approach that sought to prioritize goals for one that focuses on identifying productive actions across the full spectrum of goals, and prioritizing actions according to criteria related to those that have the greatest capacity to be implemented effectively in the short term. The task force approach outlined by Sheltair appears to offer a reasonable model to advance this general direction, albeit at the cost of additional time and resources.

In discussion of these issues and options, directors concluded that it would be most prudent to support option 5.3, shifting leadership of the project to the new Director of Sustainability, with direction to bring forward a work plan for the balance of the project as an immediate priority. In the interim, the project team will work with the consultants to complete this stage of the project, including preparation of a report that includes the draft Framework goals, draft indicators and baseline measures, and a draft inventory of current City policies, programs and initiatives related to sustainability. This information, along with feedback received at the March workshops and recommendations regarding a possible task force process for action identification, would serve as a starting point for the next phase of the project. The new Director of Sustainability, as an immediate priority, would work with the project team and consultants to bring back options and recommendations for the next phase of the project.

8. Recommendation

That Council assigns leadership of the Victoria Sustainability Framework project to the Director of Sustainability and requests the director to bring forward a process for the next phase of project as an immediate priority.

9. List of Attachments

Attachment A: Summary of Workshop Feedback Received, March 2/3, 2009

Attachment B: Recommendations to Project Team on Next Steps

Attachment C: Summary of Results, Corporate and Community Engagement Sessions, March 2/3, 2009