

Grassroots take up the challenge

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Save the environment. Save the planet. From coast to coast, local governments and citizen groups are taking up the challenge to build sustainable communities and in the process taking environmental stewardship into their own hands to lessen the burden on the planet.

"It has historically always been municipalities that have led the way with programs and initiatives that have been very innovative and progressive," says Jed Goldberg, president of Earth Day Canada.

"The federal government has been slow in reacting and so municipalities continue to carry the load."

From introducing rural virtues into high-density urban centres to putting rainwater and wind power to work, cities are leading the way to a healthier planet.

Here's a sampling of some of the **innovative, interesting and above all environmentally smart solutions** taking place across the country:

Leaf Rapids, Man. In April, this small community became the first Canadian jurisdiction to introduce a total ban on plastic bags. The new bylaw prevents retailers from selling or distributing the single-use bags. Ignoring the ban could result in a \$1,000-a-day fine.

Meanwhile, a group of residents in Perth, Ont., have been running their own initiative to reduce plastic waste by selling reusable bags for \$1.49 each. Part of the proceeds will help finance a public swimming pool in Perth.

Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan's EcoDensity Initiative is geared to making Vancouver greener, more livable and more affordable.

For the next four months, the city will ask citizens, businesses and those in the development, housing, social services and environmental communities to look at ways the City of Vancouver can promote greater density that is also green, livable and affordable.

EcoDensity will mean altering some city policies, bylaws, incentives and zoning.

The city is also developing the country's first "net-zero building" for the Olympic athletes' village. The complex will produce as much energy as it uses. Windows on both sides of all units will increase natural light and cross-ventilation. Photovoltaic cells will capture solar energy, and it will even use waste heat from an adjoining building.

Quebec City This city has been named Canada's most sustainable city by Corporate Knights magazine. It seems the almost 200-year-old city is on track to sustain itself the longest thanks to safe communities, diverse government, bikeable streets and top sewage and water treatment facilities.

White Rock, B.C. The city's new operations plant is made of recycled materials, takes advantage of natural light and ventilation, and collects rainwater that is used to run the building's toilets, wash the city's utility vehicles and fill the tanks in the street-washing trucks. Heat from the water is extracted with a heat-transfer pump and used in the building.

Port Coquitlam, B.C. All building projects now go through a "triple bottom line" checklist covering economic, environmental and social sustainability before they get approved.

Toronto It's official. Green roofs are now a trend in Toronto. Thanks to Mayor Miller's aggressive green agenda, Toronto has a budget to encourage green roofs -- there are 59 already in place. For the uninitiated, green roofs reduce energy costs for cooling, air pollution and storm water run-off. Plus you can grow food on them and birds love them. Another good idea is the city's deep-water cooling project, which uses water from Lake Ontario to cool 20-plus buildings in the downtown core. Plus, the city's Wood Green Community Housing is installing 108 solar hot water systems which will reduce emissions by 53 tonnes a year.

Winnipeg The new Manitoba Hydro Centre, a 700,000 square foot office tower, will circulate 100% fresh outdoor air around the clock and will maximize exposure to natural light. The 22-storey building is organized around the principle of "vertical

neighbourhoods," with each floor connected by stairs and an atrium to encourage interaction. Canopies at street level will counter wind-tunnel effect. Oh, and it will cut energy use by 60%.

Calgary Eco-transit in this metropolis saves 20,000 tonnes a year of greenhouse gases. Calgary's light rail transit system carries 250,000 riders each week day and it runs entirely on wind purchased from nearby wind farms. The city has also signed a 20-year agreement with its wholly owned subsidiary, ENMAX Energy Corp., to provide 75% of its electricity requirements from renewable sources, a move that will decrease emissions by more than 200,000 tonnes.

Oakville, Ont. Halton Region implemented a Landfill Gas Collection System that will eliminate more than 3,000 tonnes of methane gas that would otherwise be released into the environment. Beginning this spring, through a partnership with Oakville Hydro, the landfill gas will be burned as fuel to generate enough electricity to power 2,000 homes.

Halifax The city has become North America's gold standard when it comes to waste management and boasts the highest waste diversion rate on the continent. Its Zero Waste Plan is backed up by legislation. It is against the law to throw organic waste in the garbage. Pesticides, both for public and private use, are also banned.

Montreal Taking its cue from Toronto, Montreal started installing bicycle lanes in 2005 to facilitate cycling trips to downtown. This summer, the province will inaugurate the Route verte, a marked bicycle route that extends for more than 4,000 kilometres, links 16 regions and passes through 320 municipalities.

London, Ont. The city has saved about \$1.8-million since 2001 through a number of initiatives, from LED traffic signals to replacing city vehicles with Smart cars and hybrids, and installing air, heat and light controls on buildings.

Waterloo, Ont. The 10,000 Trees Project is an incorporated not-for-profit, environmental initiative begun in Waterloo in 2000 by volunteers. The committee has worked closely with City of Waterloo staff as it strives to reach its goal of reforesting designated growth areas, planting 10,000 trees in Waterloo in a 10-year period.

Okotoks, Alta. Unassuming Okotoks is Canada's leading municipal user of solar energy. The town's latest project, a 52-home subdivision called Drake Landing will meet 90% of its space-and water-heating needs with solar energy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions per household by five tonnes. The energy will be stored in underground boreholes during warmer months for reuse during winter. This is the first time this type of technology has been used in North America. The effort won the city a 2006 Federation of Canadian Municipalities Sustainable Community Award.