

Committee plans for sustainable Carstairs

New initiative examines town's future

BY MARK LAYCOCK
Courier Staff

A new initiative being undertaken in Carstairs aims to keep the town sustainable both economically and environmentally well into the future.

The initiative, called the Carstairs Sustainability Plan, will identify Carstairs' sustainability shortcomings and advantages in five areas: social, cultural, economic, environmental and governance. These "pillars of sustainability" will allow residents to better understand where the town currently stands in sustainability and where it is likely heading.

Sustainability coordinator Jan Thompson says that Carstairs has already accomplished a lot to ensure its sustainability, but notes there are always areas that need improvement.

"I think it's really exciting because already Carstairs has made great strides for sustainability and I think there is lots more to do and I think it's important we remember all aspects of (the plan)," says Thompson.

"We're already making a good conscious effort in Carstairs and I think that once a community starts to progress and go forward with especially the

environment issue, then we're already contributing globally to a more sustainable world as well as a community."

Thompson says some existing examples of sustainability include the gazebo in Memorial Park, which provides a stage for cultural activities, and the Carstairs Lions Recycle Centre, which ensures materials are being recycled.

"We think we are doing everything we can but as

more

information

comes to us

we'll be able to

make bigger

strides in

achieving a more

sustainable

environment in

Carstairs."

JAN THOMPSON
sustainability
co-ordinator

All municipalities across Canada have been asked to develop similar plans in their communities by the federal government in order to receive the maximum amount of funding from the government's

Gas Tax Fund. The Alberta government is also enforcing a similar policy by requiring all municipalities to complete a plan in order to receive maximum funding from the province's Municipal Sustainability Initiative.

Most communities rely heavily on funding from both levels of government.

Thompson is in the midst of establishing a 10-person steering committee of local community leaders who will meet to discuss ideas and possible short-term and long-term solutions. The committee will have until the end of June to draft a report outlining its findings to council.

Sometime in the next five months Carstairs residents will be invited to an open house to provide their input on the initiative.

Thompson emphasizes that while the environment is certainly a key part of the initiative, it isn't the only area that residents should be thinking about. During her presentation to council on Jan. 26, she identified "sustainability" as being, "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

"I think this plan brings

the four aspects together and there's a nice balance there and I think that's a really big part of it and that we're not just concentrating on the environment, which I think a lot of people get, and I think that's what makes this initiative (unique)."

In the coming months members of the steering committee, council and directors of various Town of Carstairs departments will undergo a training program dubbed "The Natural Step" that will help them identify, access and apply various concepts of sustainability in the community.

Thompson says that the initiative is certainly challenging for all involved, including the community, but will be immensely beneficial in the future.

"We think we are doing everything we can but as more information comes to us we'll be able to make bigger strides in achieving a more sustainable environment in Carstairs."

Seven pillars of sustainability

Social: Developing innovative social and community services while still preserving the historic and cultural foundation of Carstairs by ensuring co-operation between neighbourhoods, tolerance of different cultures, establishing safe communities and introducing accessible housing.

Cultural: Preserving the town's existing cultural events while encouraging new opportunities for cultural expression and fostering growth in multiple art forms (visual, dramatic, musical etc.)

Economic: Promoting new and attractive employment opportunities while encouraging local entrepreneurship through the creating of diverse job opportunities, availability of sufficient land and strong business community connections.

Environmental: Preserving the local environment as the town continues to expand with well designed municipal planning, adequate green space, biodiversity, recycle programs and protection of natural resources.

Governance: Ensure an effective and motivated leadership team that will encourage community pride and engage the community.