

Focus on sustainability: governance and economics

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In part three of an ongoing series examining the Town of Carstairs' Municipal Sustainability Initiative, the Courier discusses the future of economics and governance in Carstairs with sustainability co-ordinator Jan Thompson.

As if small-town businesses weren't having a hard enough time fending off the advances of large retail stores, an economic recession just had to blow in.

In the past few years Carstairs businesses, and even those of surrounding towns, have been trying their hardest to convince shoppers to visit their local shopping centres. As most residents will notice, many have pushed forward against the onslaught of big-box marts, while others haven't been so lucky.

Business owners, and even the town of Carstairs, are always in search of new ways to keep business local, and all it may take is a few small ideas and one big brainstorming session.

Such an issue is one of a handful identified in the economic pillar of the Carstairs Municipal

Sustainability Initiative. The initiative invites people of all ages to discuss their ideas for the future of not only the local economy, but also governance, culture, social progress, and the environment.

Jan Thompson, sustainability co-ordinator, says ideas to keep a healthy economy should centre around four key aspects:

- Providing a wide range of jobs and training opportunities
- Providing sufficient land and buildings to support economic prosperity and change
- Dynamic job and business creation
- A strong business community with links into the wider economy

In terms of governance, Thompson says strong leadership in council and even in various community boards and groups is crucial in ensuring everyone is contributing a positive message to the town. In turn, this also creates an even stronger sense of community pride as residents see improvements made to the town.

"They want their community to be a desirable place to live, so they want to see a nice Memorial Park where they can entertain

company... everybody wants a nice school or a couple of schools. We need all these things, those are the things that bring people to a community," says Thompson.

The determination of small groups to introduce something to the community has the ability to have a profound impact on the town if ideas are brought to council and carried out.

Thompson notes one such idea by a local woman who proposed planting birth trees, whereby residents would plant a tree in a town green space when they have a child. Such an idea not only instills a sense of community pride, but also makes Carstairs a little greener in the process.

"It's great that this person wants their community to have a little bit more and it's a different idea."

Thompson is inviting any residents with ideas or concerns to attend a sustainability workshop on April 22 from 6 to 9:30 p.m. at the legion, during the town's Sustainability Week, which runs from April 20 - 24.

For more information on the initiative, please call Jan Thompson at 403-337-3341.

Next week: the environment.