

TEN THEMES OF SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability means taking only what we need from the world to live well and leaving enough for future generations to have a good life too. So what we do today is important because it can make life better or worse for people who come after us. Our actions can also make life better today by reducing pollution and improving health for everyone.

The best way to make our city sustainable is to focus on the things that interest us most. People have different interests. The Themes below divide sustainability into broad areas of interest. You can think about them and decide what are the issues and actions we need to take for each Theme. But for your own activities or projects, pick what interests you.

Theme 1 - **TRANSPORTATION**

“movement of goods and people”

When people or goods travel a shorter distance, it saves energy and time. Riding a bus uses less energy than driving a car. Bicycles use even less energy (although the riders may need more Power Bars). RightBike repairs old bicycles and rents them at a cheap rate. Should schools help with that? Is it more efficient to have our pizza delivered or pick it up? Why not make our own? Are pedestrian bridges a good idea?

Theme 2 - **ENERGY**

“for buildings, transportation, manufacturing and agriculture”

Heating and cooling buildings use a lot of energy. Planting trees around buildings reduces energy use. So does more insulation. Do we need more electric cars? Should people just use pick-up trucks for farm and construction work, and use cars for family trips? Is it better to buy a barbecue made in Ontario rather than one shipped from another country? Should we eat organic food because it does not use fertilizers made from petroleum? Should farmers use gas from cows to run machinery?

Theme 3 - **DESIGN**

“of buildings, roads, public spaces and communities”

Proper design of buildings will reduce energy use and improve indoor air quality. When houses are built in neighbourhood clusters, with green spaces in between them, residents can meet each other and experience nature more easily. Street crossings should be safe for pedestrians. Pathways allow people to walk or cycle where they need to go. Do we need more pools and trees in parks so people will use air conditioners less in the summer?

Theme 4 – **HABITAT**

“living places for plants and animals, both urban or rural, on land or in water”

Habitat is the place where plants and animals live. City parks and trails provide habitat for many species. If two parks are connected with a green corridor, animals can move from one to the other to breed and maintain their population. Rural green spaces support more species. But even small urban spaces such as planted rooftops can provide habitat for birds and butterflies. Lakes, rivers, ponds and streams are habitat for fish, birds, animals and insects. How can keep them more natural?

Theme 5 - **FOOD**

“local or organic food, urban gardens, heritage crops & animals”

Food from nearby farms is fresher and uses much less energy for shipping. Vegetables grown at home taste great. Organic crops and animals do not pollute the environment with artificial fertilizers, hormones or pesticides. They also do not harm pollinating insects, such as honey bees. Heritage crops and animals are varieties used in the past. They may not grow as fast, but can resist modern crop diseases and taste really good.

Theme 6 - **NATURAL CAPITAL**

“soil, water, wood, air and other natural materials that meet human needs”

Natural capital is the elements of nature we use to meet our needs. To be sustainable we want to protect soil and water, and use natural materials in smart ways. Compact cities use up less farmland. Forests and ponds keep our groundwater clean. Construction sites that reuse cut pieces of wood are conserving natural capital. Producing maple syrup is a sustainable use of a forest. Glass bottles are more sustainable than plastic.

Theme 7 - **WASTE CONTROL**

“reducing, reusing, recycling and processing of waste, and conversion of waste to energy”

Smart design creates products that last a long time and this reduces waste. Tools that are 100 year old still work. When we use old things in new ways, such as growing tomatoes in an old barrel, we are recycling. Reuse is a special form of this, giving unwanted items to others. Garbage should be disposed of properly and can even be converted to energy.

Theme 8 - **HEALTH**

“clean air and water, safety, tranquility, and environmental needs of vulnerable groups”

Clean air and water are important to our health. Less vehicles on the roads will keep our air cleaner. Taking old medicine to the drug store reduces river pollution. Pathways must be kept safe for people using them. Spending time in natural areas relaxes us. Seniors and handicapped people need the outdoors too. How can we help them?

Theme 9 - **RECREATION**

“non-motorized activities, urban or rural recreation, 'greening' of events”

There are many forms of non-motorized recreation that we can call sustainable. For example, tennis, basketball, swimming, softball, soccer etc. Do you do any of these? Rural areas provide recreation for urban residents. This includes: fishing, camping, sailing, kayaking, skiing etc. Farm visits are a special type of rural recreation that provide extra income to maintain small traditional farms that are easier on the environment. How can we make sports events “greener?”

Theme 10 - **SENSE OF PLACE**

“feeling of belonging to a community or city, that leads to care for others and environmental stewardship”

When we like where we live, it makes us feel we belong. This leads to a sense of community. And then we tend to care more for people and the environment around us – stewardship. What parts of your neighbourhood or city give you a sense of place? How do music, sports or other events increase the feeling that where we live is special?