



Catalyzing Change: Leading Practices in Alberta Municipal Sustainability Planning

November 10, 2011

*Presented in partnership with the
AUMA, FCM and UNSM*

- Introductions
- Research & Findings
- Panel Discussion
- Q & A

Catalyzing Change

Leading Practices in Alberta Municipal Sustainability Planning

By Chris Lindberg, Senior Consultant

Alberta has emerged as a national leader in developing municipal sustainability plans (MSPs) to address growing economic, social and environmental risks and opportunities. In light of this, Stratos undertook the first comprehensive review of Alberta MSPs to identify trends and leading practices.

The review found that the majority of MSPs are grounded in strong community processes and frameworks, but would benefit from more specific goals, targets and integration strategies. There is tremendous variability in terms of the structure, quality and comprehensiveness of the MSPs, which poses risks for their implementation.

To address this issue, Stratos has developed a framework for structuring MSPs to support effective action on sustainability. It can be used to:

- Assess the quality of your MSP and benchmark it against leading practices in other municipalities.
- Support the implementation of your MSP by identifying gaps and areas for action.
- Inform the process, content and structure of other municipal plans (e.g. strategic plans, energy plans) which operate within a sustainability framework.

A FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY PLANS

Fourteen municipalities were selected for the review:¹

- Airdrie
- Grande Prairie
- Olds
- Brooks
- Drayton Valley
- Peace River
- Cochrane
- Hinton
- Taber
- Drumheller
- Jasper
- Wetaskiwin
- Fort Saskatchewan
- Morinville

¹Selected municipalities had i) a Council-approved MSP, ii) a population of >4,000 and iii) developed their MSPs with the support of the AUMA MSP program and/or the FCM Green Municipal Fund.

²Key inputs included MSP guidance documents from the AUMA and The Natural Step Canada, a review of strategic planning best practices, and the findings of Stratos' three MSP implementation workshops.

³Stratos would like to thank its Advisory Committee: Rachel Boccock, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association; Donna Chiarelli and Joca Glor-Bell, Federation of Canadian Municipalities; Debbie Nielson, Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities; Lars Hallstrom, University of Alberta; and Sean Connelly, University of Regina.

A comprehensive assessment framework was developed based on a review of best practices² and input from an Advisory Committee of academic researchers and municipal associations.³

Each MSP was assessed and scored from 1-4 on each of the framework's nine elements, with four representing the leading practice. Figure 1 presents the results of the assessment.

Framework Element	High Score (3 or 4)	Low Score (1 or 2)
Analysis	36%	64%
Strategic Framework	50%	50%
Community Engagement	12%	86%
Sustainability Framework	25%	71%
Vision, Goals and Targets	43%	57%
Comprehensiveness	36%	64%
Reporting and Indicators	43%	57%
Action Planning	21%	79%
Integration	36%	64%

Figure 1 – Key Findings: Percentage of MSPs with high and low scores for each framework element

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Panel Members



Lloyd Bertschi
Mayor,
Morinville



Bernie Kreiner,
Town Manager
Hinton



Janet Cooper,
Environmental
Stewardship
Coordinator,
Jasper



Kathy Dietrich,
Supervisor Planning &
Engineering
Town of Cochrane



Shaun Fox,
Chair, Olds Advisory
Group for Sustainable
Living
Town of Olds

- ✓ Stratos is a specialized management consulting firm that helps businesses, governments and not-for-profits recognize and act on environmental, social and economic risks and opportunities.
- ✓ We work with municipalities to transform their sustainability visions into reality by identifying and overcoming the barriers to implementation.
- ✓ We have offices in Calgary and Ottawa



Chris Lindberg
*Senior Consultant,
Municipal Lead,
Stratos*

VISION

*“A healthy planet. An equitable world.
A sustainable future.”*

MISSION

“We work together to empower organizations to take real steps towards sustainability.”



Planning

- What we plan to do...
- Our commitment...
- Our long-term visions and values...



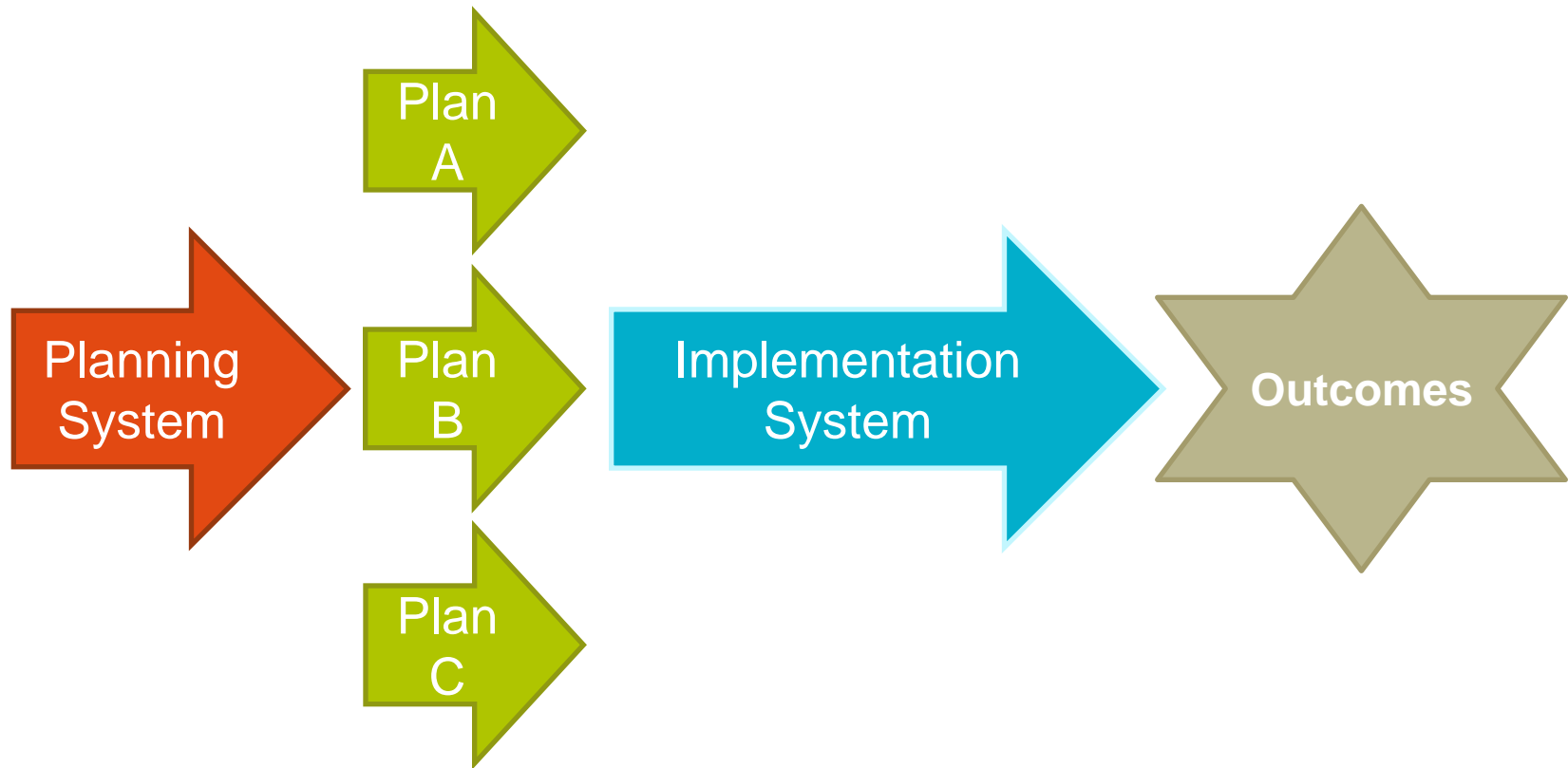
Implementation

- What we actually do...
- Our accountability...
- Our short term operational targets and objectives...

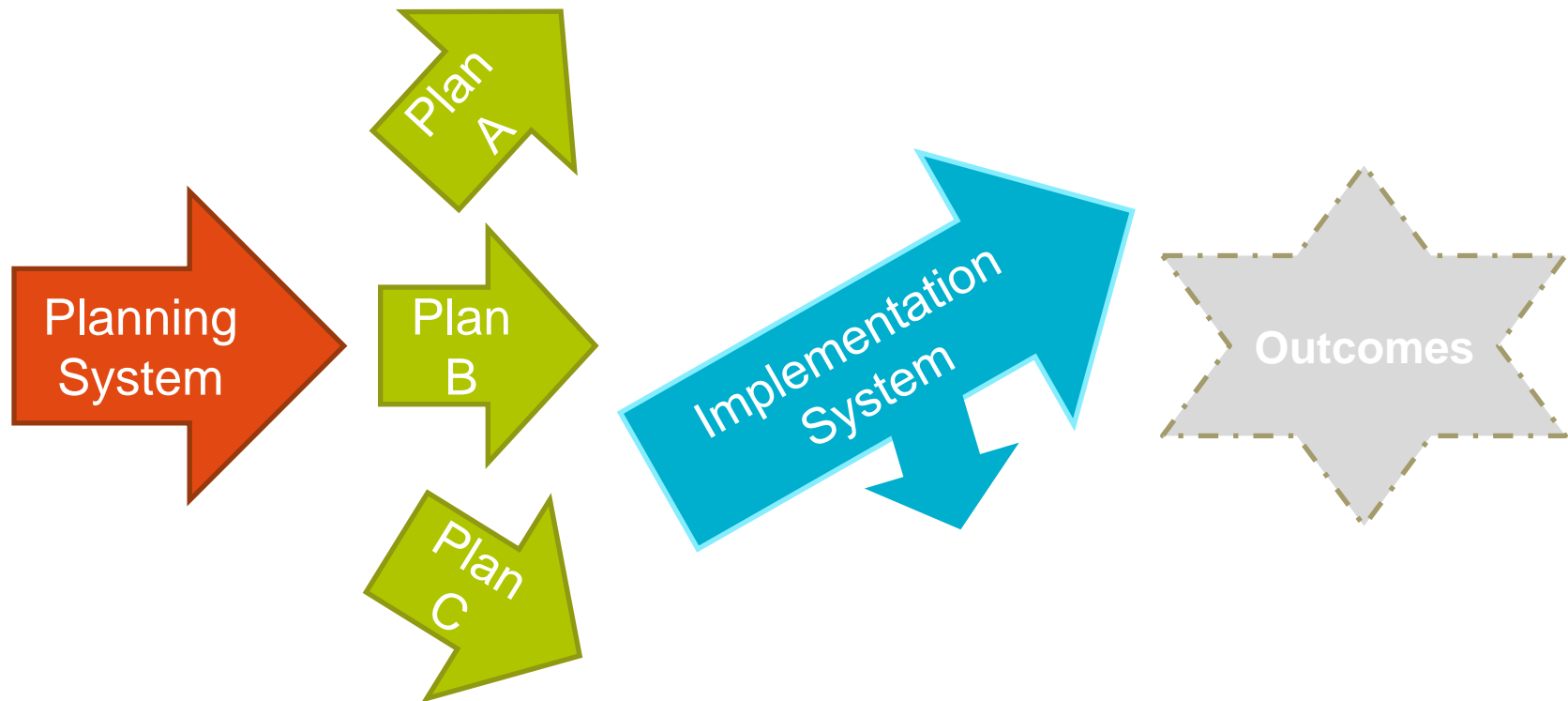
Potential Consequences

- Eroded trust
- Lost momentum
- Missed opportunities

When everything is aligned, the gap is small...



...but when not aligned, the gap is significant



Sustainability and the P-I Gap

Sustainability plans are predisposed towards significant gaps...

- Extensive planning and engagement processes can lead to burnout, loss of momentum and unrealistic expectations
- Long-term goals can be challenging to translate into short-term actions
- Broad scope impacts all aspects of community life and government
- Sets a new direction, new way of doing things – but the same system is responsible for implementation

...and often end up feeling like an added responsibility/ cost/ expectation on the side of your desk

Green Roofs **Community Engagement**
Climate Change **WATER** **Aging Population**
Affordable housing **Local FOOD**
Health Care **Peak Oil** **Infrastructure Deficit**
CITIZEN EXPECTATION

Moving Sustainability to the Middle of the Desk



3. Manage Performance and Change

2. Integrate sustainability into decision-making

1. Create an effective plan

OUTREACH
&
EDUCATION

POLICY &
PLANNING

PARTNERSHIP &
ENGAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP &
STRUCTURE

DECISION-MAKING
SUPPORT TOOLS

MANAGEMENT &
PERFORMANCE

Creating an Effective Plan: Alberta Research



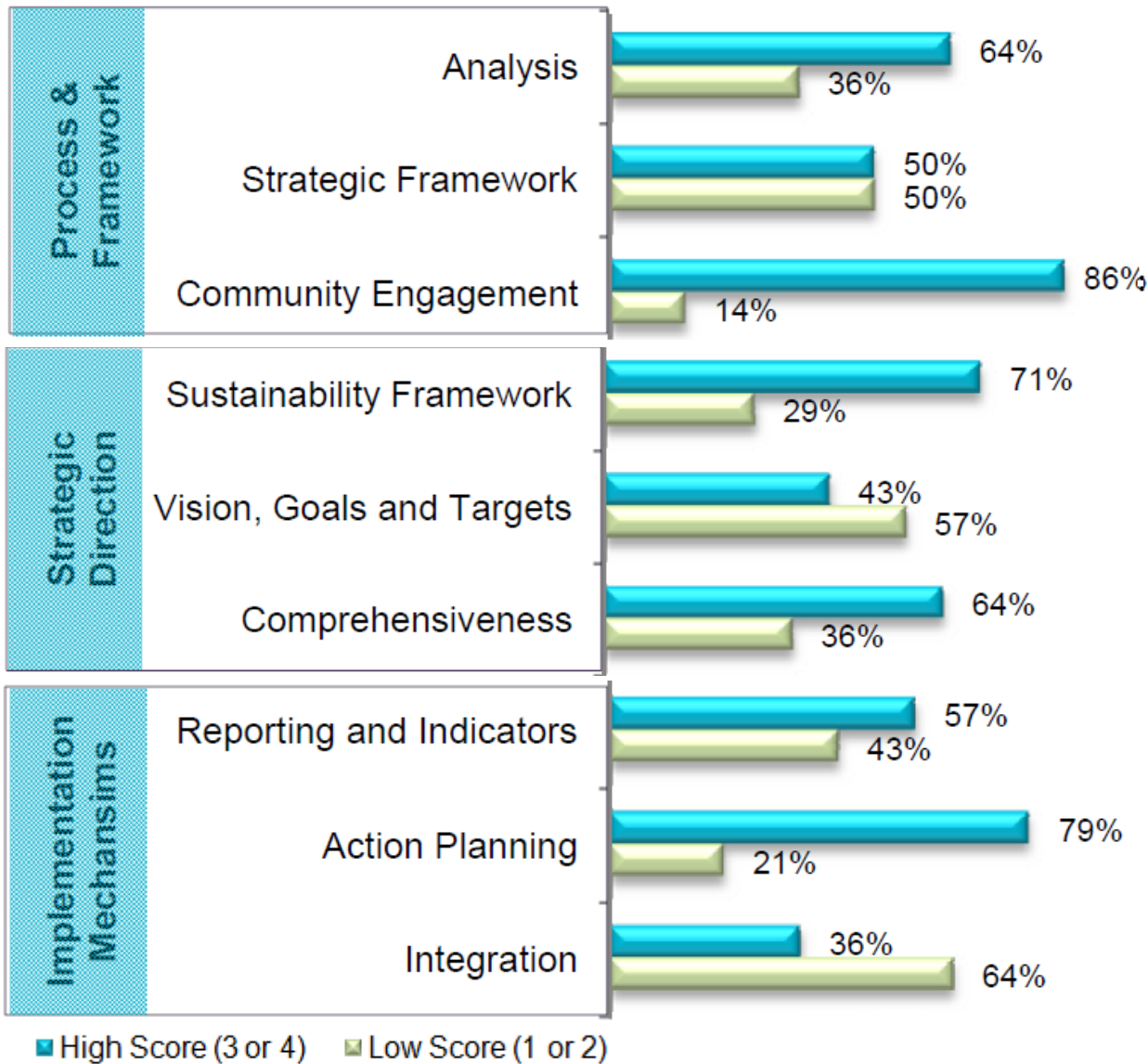
- **Reviewed 14 municipalities in Alberta** with an approved MSP and a population greater than 4,000:
 - Airdrie
 - Grande Prairie
 - Olds
 - Brooks
 - Drayton Valley
 - Peace River
 - Cochrane
 - Hinton
 - Taber
 - Drumheller
 - Jasper
 - Wetaskiwin
 - Fort Saskatchewan
 - Morinville
- **Created an assessment framework** based on best practices in strategic planning and sustainable community development.
- Scored MSPs and identified trends and **leading practices**.

Process & Framework	Analysis Strategic Framework Community Engagement
Strategic Direction	Sustainability Framework Vision, Goals and Targets Comprehensiveness
Implementation Mechanisms	Reporting and Indicators Action Planning Integration

Thanks to our Advisory Committee:

- Alberta Urban Municipalities Association
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- University of Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities
- Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities
- University of Regina

Overall Results



Top Scoring MSPs:

- Morinville
- Jasper
- Cochrane
- Hinton

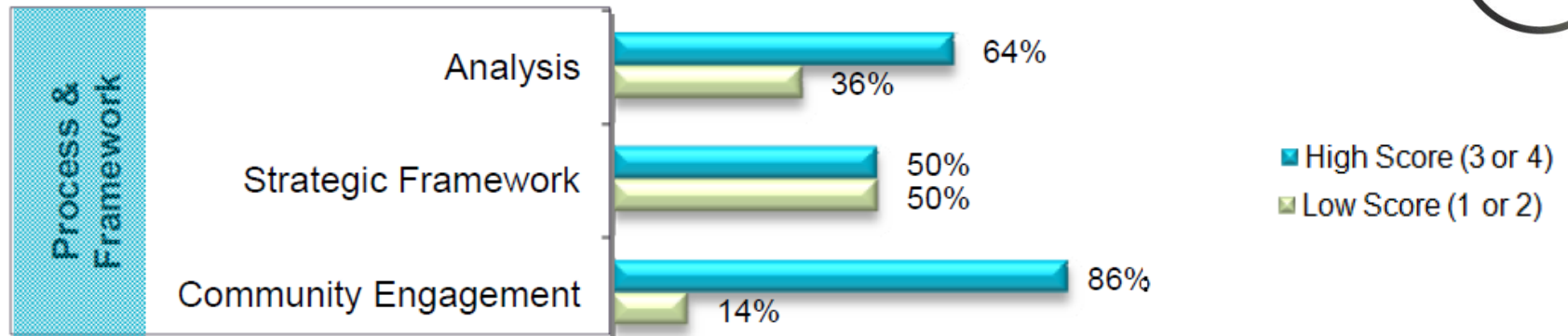
Strongest Areas:

- Community Engagement
- Sustainability Framework
- Action Planning

Weakest Areas:

- Strategic Framework
- Vision, Goals and Targets
- Integration

Framework Elements



Analysis

The MSP is informed by a comprehensive analysis of relevant sustainability issues and the municipality's current reality, assets and challenges.

Strategic Framework

A framework clearly aligns the MSP with other municipal strategies and connects all levels of planning with a common language, structure and approach.

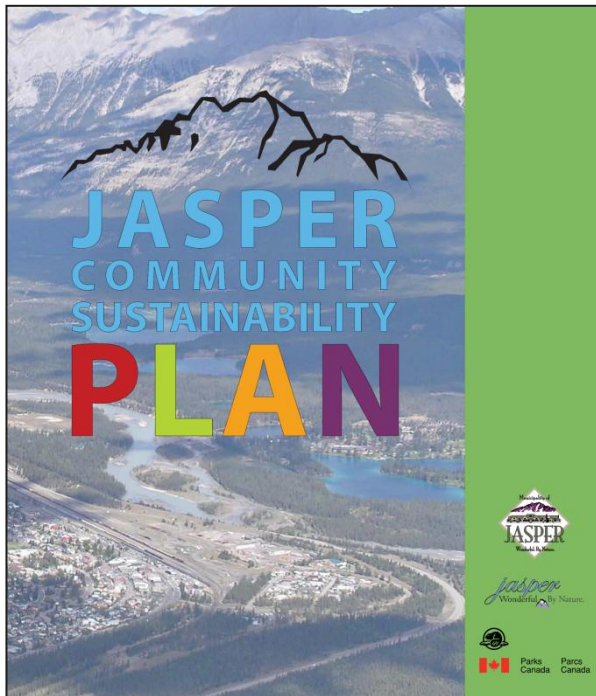
Community Engagement

Community members were meaningfully engaged throughout the development of the MSP and there is a clear commitment and mechanism for ongoing engagement during implementation.

Strategic Framework

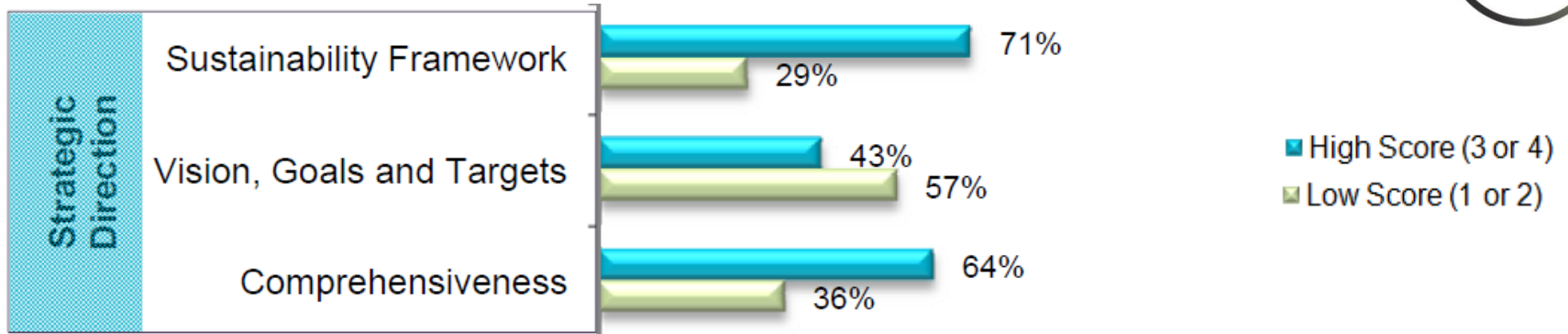


- **50%** of municipalities did not communicate how their MSPs align to other plans, and only four provided detail about how the MSP will guide policymaking in the future.
- A strategic framework is vital to guide the implementation process and communicate to staff and public why the MSP matters.



Leading Example: Jasper includes a *Sustainability Planning Framework* or *Adaptive Management Framework* that facilitates translation of the Community Vision and sustainability principles into more detailed goals and targets. The framework helped the community to identify, make, and support decisions. The framework also allows an understanding of how decisions build upon prior decisions, placing the plan at a high level and making it adaptable to change.

Framework Elements



Sustainability framework

A comprehensive sustainability definition and framework guides planning and decision-making.

Vision, Goals and Targets

There is a compelling long-term vision supported by clear, concise and inherently measurable goals with specific, timebound targets.

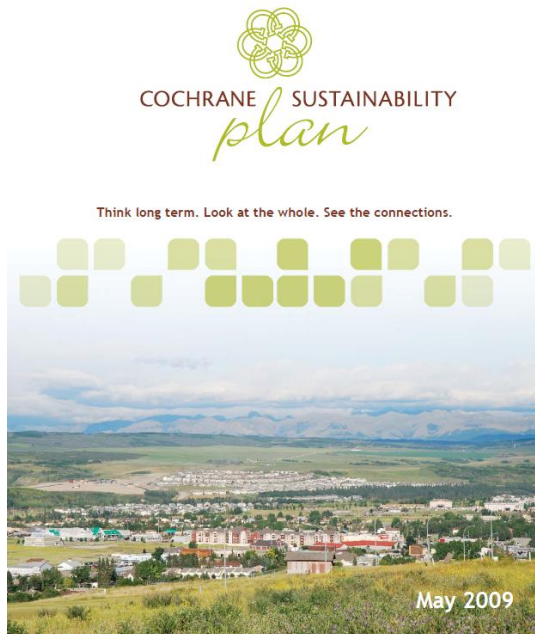
Comprehensiveness

The MSP addresses a broad range of municipal sustainability issues and pillars.

Vision, Goals and Targets



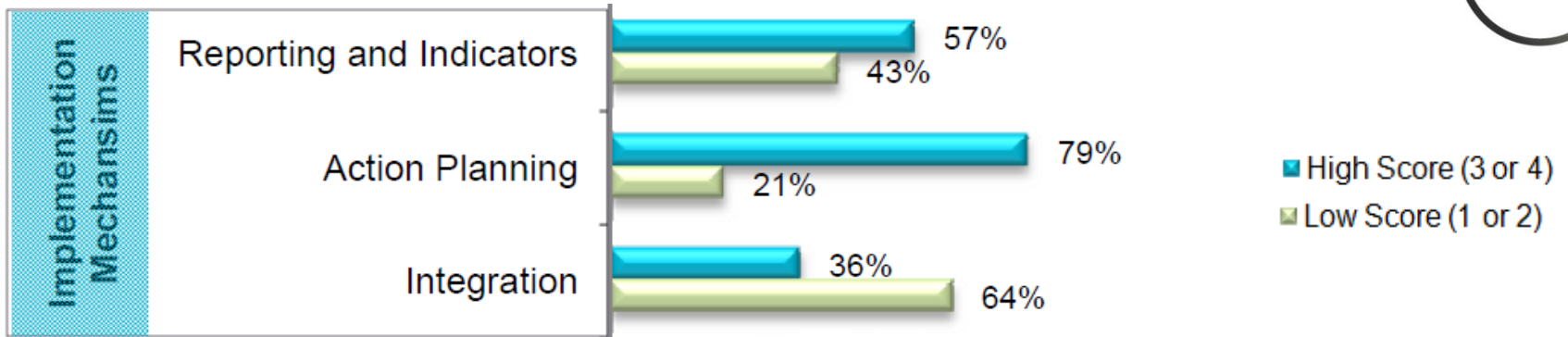
- **57%** of reviewed plans did not have specific, measurable goals and targets to build momentum and drive actions towards change.
- Vision, goals and targets are necessary to create accountability and ownership of a plan



Leading Example: **Cochrane provides a strong vision** statement with a compelling narrative. The plan's goals are clear and accompanied by thoughtful descriptions of success. Time-bound targets accompany each goal, such as: "By 2029, the number of businesses in Cochrane across all sectors increases by 50%."

Similarly, **Drayton Valley's MSP identifies** key strategies and 1-,5-,10- and 25-year targets for each goal.

Framework Elements



Reporting and indicators

Appropriate indicators and metrics are identified for each goal, a monitoring mechanism is in place, and there is a clear commitment to regular, public reporting on progress.

Action planning

There is a clear indication that an action plan has been or will be developed that identifies short-term priorities and assigns appropriate resources and responsibilities.

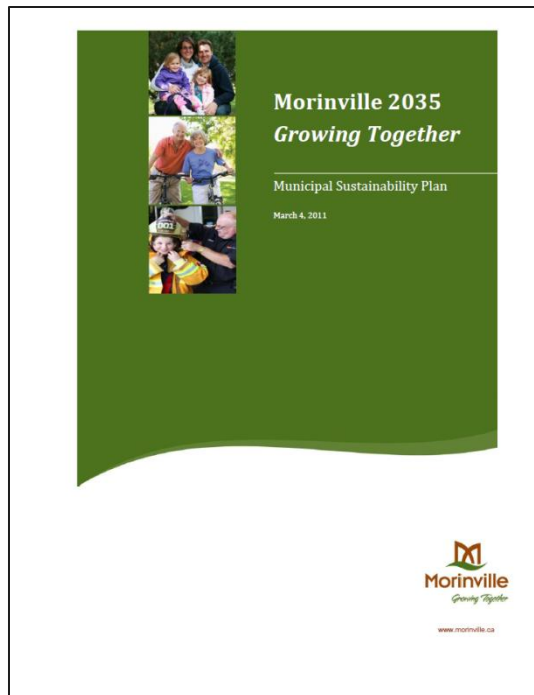
Integration

There is a strategy for implementation that outlines how the plan will be integrated into existing municipal structures, processes, documents and frameworks.

Integration into Decision-Making



- 64% of plans reviewed did not show a clear commitment and approach to integrating their MSP into planning and decision-making.
- Implementing sustainability inherently requires adopting new processes, structures and criteria for decision-making.



Leading Example: Morinville includes a seven-part framework outlining how they will integrate the MSP into core planning and decision-making. Areas addressed include leadership, structure and performance management. The framework draws on research related to common implementation barriers and solutions.

Plan Comprehensiveness

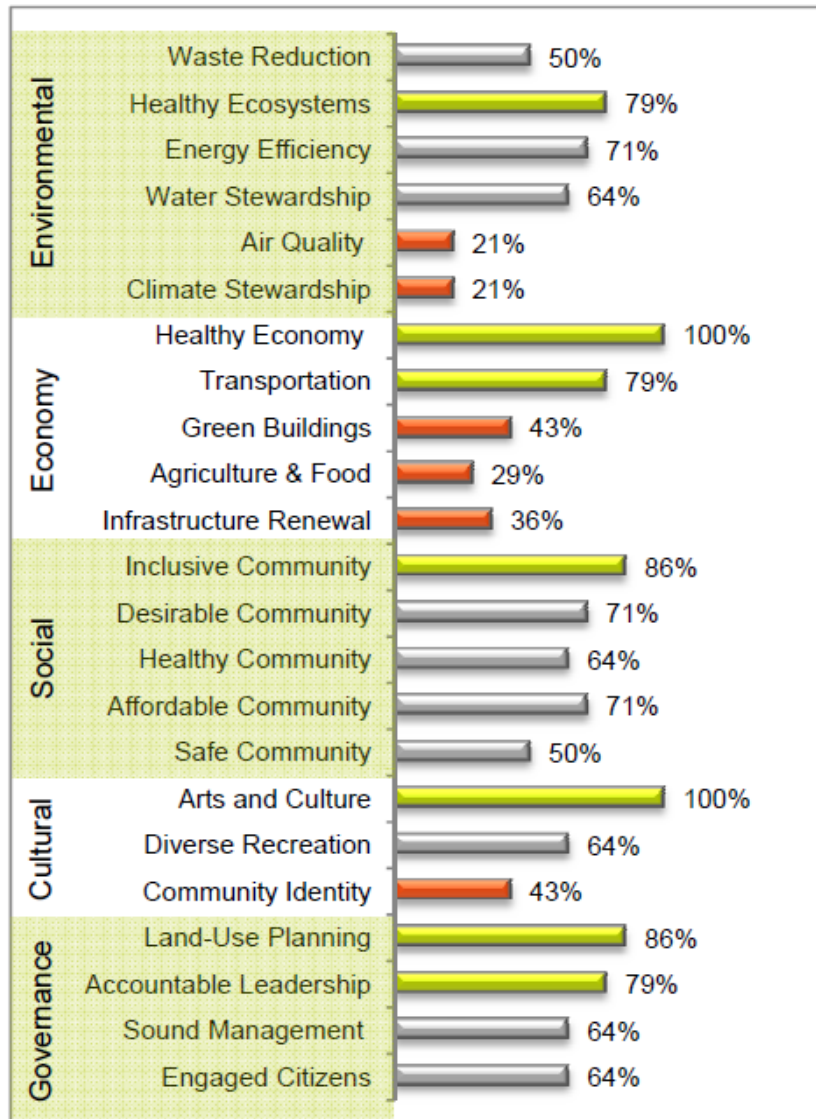


Table depicting the range of goals included in the MSPs:

- Goals are broken down into five pillar areas.
- Highlighted in green depicts that the goal had a high level of inclusion in plans.
- Highlighted in orange depicts that the goal had a lower level of inclusion in plans.

- MSPs are generally grounded in strong process and analysis, such as extensive community engagement and current-state research.
- Tend to favour short-term actions over long-term outcomes
- Strategy and integration are key areas for improvement.
- The importance of applying a strategic lens to the development and implementation of MSPs and related plans.

In the long run, a great plan isn't enough to make a great community. It is how you implement that plan that counts.

- How is this report relevant for your MSP?
- What are some of the lessons learned from your municipality's experience with developing an MSP? If you could do it all again, what would you do differently?
- What are the strengths of your MSP that have helped with implementation?
- What are some challenges that you are facing with the implementation phase of your MSP? How could this report help you to address those challenges?
- Do you have any words of advice for municipalities that are thinking of creating or implementing a sustainability plan?

Question and Answer Period



Stratos Sustainability Check-Up



- **Assess** your sustainability plan and policy framework.
- **Diagnose** your organization's implementation strengths and challenges.
- **Prescribe** a change strategy to mitigate challenges and accelerate meaningful action.

Benefits:

Organize staff to share critiques on the current-state and identify untapped opportunities.

Identify and discuss key implementation challenges and solutions.

Develop personalized strategies and tools to help overcome challenges.

Optimize staff time, flag high-priority actions, streamline municipal activities and inspire staff action.

Sustainability Check Up

Municipal Sustainability Planning & Implementation

Stratos has developed a suite of tools, frameworks and services to help municipalities bridge the gap between sustainability planning and action. Whether you already have a plan or are looking to develop one, Stratos can help you structure your decision-making systems to support effective action on sustainability.

Stratos' Sustainability Check Up services are designed to assess your sustainability plan and policy framework, diagnose your organization's implementation strengths and challenges and prescribe a change strategy to mitigate challenges and accelerate meaningful action. It includes:

- 1. A Sustainability Plan Assessment and Scorecard:** A review of your sustainability plan and strategic documents using Stratos' framework for effective sustainability planning. The output is a customized Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP) Scorecard that benchmarks your performance against other municipalities.
- 2. An Integration Assessment Workshop:** An assessment of your municipality's implementation strengths and challenges using Stratos' framework for integrating sustainability into decision-making (see Figure 1). This workshop will lead key staff through our best-practice framework and assessment questionnaire.
- 3. An Action Report:** A concise report containing the results of two assessments, key recommendations and an action plan for your municipality to improve performance and implementation.

The Sustainability Check Up will help you to:

Organize staff to share critiques on the current-state and identify untapped opportunities.

Identify and discuss key implementation challenges and solutions.

Develop personalized strategies and tools to help overcome challenges.

Optimize staff time, flag high-priority actions, streamline municipal activities and inspire staff action.

Stratos is a specialized management consulting firm that helps businesses, governments and not-for-profits recognize and act on environmental, social and economic risks and opportunities. Stratos works with municipalities to transform their sustainability visions into reality by identifying and overcoming the barriers to implementation. For more information contact Chris Lindberg clindberg@stratos-sts.com / 613.241.1001 x238 and visit www.stratos-sts.com.

Figure 1 Our Framework for Integrating Sustainability into Decision-Making

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November 10, 2011

Leading Practices in Alberta Municipal Sustainability Planning

Strategies to Sustainability

Thank You for Participating



Chris Lindberg
*Senior Consultant,
Municipal Lead,
Stratos*

- A recognized expert in sustainable community development
- More than fifteen years of experience delivering strategic planning, sustainability, stakeholder engagement and management services

Stratos offers the following services to help municipalities reach their **sustainability targets:**

- ✓ Municipal and community sustainability planning
- ✓ Corporate sustainability and strategic plans
- ✓ Implementation and business planning
- ✓ Performance management and reporting systems
- ✓ Community investment strategies
- ✓ Change and risk management strategies

You can check out our most recent thought pieces after the webinar, below:

- Catalyzing Change report [here](#)
- Integrating Sustainability into Decision Making [here](#)
- Governance for Resilient, Sustainable Cities [here](#)

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