

Kitchen Table Conversation Report

Name of Group/Organization: Alberta Health Services

Conversation Topic: Environmental Resources

Number of people in Conversation: 12

Date: September 12th, 2016

Describe your Conversation: During the morning of September 12, Lethbridge-based Alberta Health Services public and environmental health staff members joined City of Lethbridge Community Planners to talk about the needs, benefits and responsibilities of protecting environmental resources in the City. The conversation was facilitated by Perry Stein and Andrew Malcolm, from the City of Lethbridge and Sean Robinson, from Alberta Health Services.

There was strong consensus among the group about the benefits of preserving environmental resources (e.g., water quality, air quality), and also around the challenges of encouraging community members to become actively involved.

There was some disagreement about the relative value of certain “conservation” actions, with conversation participants pointing to the need for the City (and its partners) to provide clear data about these actions in order to demonstrate their value. There was also strong encouragement for the City to continue building its relationship and collaboration with Alberta Health Services for the benefit of all community members.

It became very clear through the conversation that AHS staff have experience with many of topics discussed, from a public health standpoint. This perspective was shared with the City of Lethbridge staff, who similarly offered their thoughts from a Community Planning lens.



Conversation 1: Environmental Footprint

- Minimizing our environmental footprint is a balancing act between what is technically possible, against cost and moral responsibility
- We need to find cost effective ways to reduce our footprint
- We need to use our environmental resources wisely for the benefit of future generations
- There are alternatives that we should explore (e.g., stormwater management; innovative designs)
- There are different scales of intervention (household, neighbourhood, city, region)
- All environmental efforts promote positive change / benefits
 - Some initiatives are flawed, or don't turn out that way intended them to. This is okay. We can learn from these failures.
- We need to weigh short and long-term costs
 - E.g., change away from coal burning will have a large short-term costs, but the long-term benefit will be great
- Big picture perspective—there is a lack of foresight for future potential problems (e.g., short term budget cuts that have big long-term implications or result in burden shifting to others)
- We need to provide people with incentives

- Examples: Curbside—make it easy for people to recycling; Water—increase the costs so people have an incentive to conserve
- The other approach is to make things expensive or inconvenient (e.g., tobacco use)
- Minimizing our environmental footprint has economic, environmental and social impacts—this includes public health benefits

Conversation 2: Water Conservation and Quality

- Locally, our water quality is supreme
- Use of potable water for watering lawns is troubling
 - We should transition to rail barrels or similar
- Responsibility
 - Shared responsibility (individuals, land developers, City)
 - Developer is in a position of power—how can we get them to put in innovative rules to support water conservation
 - E.g., less limits on low impact landscaping
 - Need to think holistically
 - Design to be efficient
 - City needs to encourage / incentivize
 - Homeowners need to be provided with information
- Historical trends
 - We are in a period of great fluctuations: drought and floods
 - We need to prepare for both
- What is the impact of one resident's actions to conserve water when we have large industry and agricultural operations using massive amounts of water—the City needs to demonstrate the relative value or potential collective impact
 - What is the impact of me installing a low-flow toilet or taking a longer shower?—what is the cumulative impact
 - City needs to provide this information
- How do we convince the public, especially skeptical audiences? Data!

Conversation 3: Native Plants

- When we have native plants being watered like traditional plants it defeats the purpose
- Need to make native plants accessible to the public—how?
- Need to incorporate native plants into the design of large areas and individual homes
- Native plants maybe the solution to the question on water conservation and quality
- City's role? Education, providing data, making access to plants easier
- Highlight and showcase examples of where native plants have been incorporated (e.g., Galt, Nature Centre)
- What are the barriers to people using native plants? Need to identify these
- Do people have access to what they need?
- There are some community members who will use native plants; others will say no way; a third group sit on the fence. We need to target this third audience with our efforts.

Conversation 4: Air Quality

- Seeing higher numbers of fine particulate matter

- Locally, people know that we have higher incidences of asthma
- We need to again remove barriers—let people who want to take action, do it!
- What can an individual do?
- Neighbourhood design is important: district systems, solar panels, Sunridge is a great example (why don't we do more neighbourhoods like this?)
- City needs to educate and incentivize
- It is tough to put an economic argument behind improving air quality for the average resident
- We need an air shed society locally
- Why aren't we using more ethanol gas?
- Regulations are at the provincial level

Conversation 5: Environmental Policy

- City should consider:
 - Food security
 - Active transportation—make the connection between environmental outcomes and transportation policy
 - Smoke free public spaces (more than tobacco)
 - Target the output, not the specific source (e.g., tobacco, marijuana, hookah)
 - No smoking in public spaces (e.g., farmers' markets, sidewalks and pathways)—but we would need to provide people who do smoke with places to go
 - Less restrictions on household activities so people can contribute to these outcomes more easily
 - Injury prevention / public safety
 - Emergency planning
 - Severe weather events (e.g., fires, floods, drought)
- Where does climate change fit in?