



Guide 5 Access to green space

Blue Dot

Municipal Toolkit
Creating Green Communities



Blue Dot Municipal Toolkit

People in Canada take pride in this country's natural landscapes, rich ecosystems and wildlife. But Canada's Constitution doesn't mention environmental rights and responsibilities. Municipalities across the country are recognizing and supporting their residents' right to a healthy environment. By adopting the Blue Dot declaration, more than 150 municipal governments now support the right to clean air and water, safe food, a stable climate and a say in decisions that affect our health and well-being.

For some municipalities, adopting the Blue Dot declaration is a clear statement about environmental initiatives already underway. For others, it's a significant first step. Either way, after passing a declaration, many ask "What happens next?"

This toolkit provides practical ideas for next steps. Its introduction and 13 downloadable guides cover topics related to human health, green communities and a low-carbon future. Written for policy-makers, each guide shares examples of policies and projects undertaken in communities in Canada and around the world. The goal is to inform, inspire and share good ideas and great practices that will lead to healthier, more sustainable communities now and in the future.

The following guides are available:

Introduction to the Blue Dot Municipal Toolkit

Protecting Human Health

- Guide 1: Air quality
- Guide 2: Clean water
- Guide 3: Non-toxic environment
- Guide 4: Healthy food

Creating Green Communities

- Guide 5: Access to green space
- Guide 6: Protecting and restoring biodiversity
- Guide 7: Zero waste

Building a Low Carbon Future

- Guide 8: Transitioning to 100% renewable energy
- Guide 9: Green buildings
- Guide 10: Sustainable transportation
- Guide 11: Green economy
- Guide 12: Climate change adaptation
- Guide 13: Ecological footprint and land use planning

To read more about municipal actions for environmental rights, and to access all the Blue Dot toolkit guides, visit <http://bluedot.ca/municipal-toolkits/>. To read more about the Blue Dot movement and work at the local, provincial and federal levels, visit www.bluedot.ca.

Ensuring a healthy environment requires action in communities of all sizes and at all levels of government. This toolkit helps municipalities continue to take the lead.

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Creating Green Communities

Guide 5: Access to green space

Urban green spaces contribute to population health directly by improving air quality and moderating temperatures and indirectly by supporting active lifestyles and reducing stress. Maintaining green space contributes to a municipality's economy through tourism, recreation and increased property values.¹ Communities can develop parks and other natural spaces, set tree canopy requirements for development zones, restore ecological services and improve access. Increasing green space may also help protect biodiversity. This section focuses on increasing residents' access to nature as part of their right to a healthy environment. Guide 6: Protecting and restoring biodiversity provides best practices and examples for protecting biodiversity.

Canadian examples of good practices

a. Ottawa

- i. **Initiatives:** Ottawa's Greenspace Master Plan sets goals for achieving adequate, accessible, quality, connected, sustainable greenspace. The city aims to provide four hectares of greenspace (open space, parks or leisure land) per 1,000 people. Newer communities must have at least two hectares of park and leisure land for every 1,000 residents. The Ontario Planning Act allows for 1.2 hectares of dedicated parkland per 1,000 residents; the rest must be made up through land acquisition and negotiation. Most communities were meeting this greenspace goal when the Greenspace Master Plan was written in 2006.² The city's accessibility goal is for all homes in the urban area to be within 400 metres of greenspace. Ottawa last assessed this in 2013, at which time more than 95 per cent of homes met the target. The Greenspace Master Plan is integrated with the Ontario Greenbelt.³
- ii. Ottawa also funds the Green Acres Reforestation Program. That assists rural landowners with planting plans and stock at moderate prices with the goal of achieving 30 per cent forest cover.⁴ The plan protects Ottawa's natural heritage system, including wetlands and wildlife habitat.⁵
- iii. **Results:** Ottawa ranked third in the North American Green City Index for Land Use because of its green space.⁶

b. Surrey, B.C.

- i. **Background:** Surrey's Official Community Plan has a goal of 4.2 hectares of park per 1,000 people, with specific park type goals (1.2 hectares for city parks, one hectare for community

1 Environmental Law Centre, UVic Faculty of Law, and Deborah Curran & Company, Green Bylaws Toolkit.

2 City of Ottawa, Greenspace Master Plan, 2006, <http://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/planning-and-development/official-plan-and-master-plans/greenspace-master-plan>

3 National Capital Commission, Canada's Capital Greenbelt Master Plan, 2013, http://www.ncc-ccn.gc.ca/sites/default/files/pubs/gbmp-en_jan2014.pdf

4 City of Ottawa, "Green Acres-Ottawa's Rural Reforestation Program," 2015, <http://ottawa.ca/en/residents/water-and-environment/trees-and-community-forests/planting#green-acres-ottawas-rural-reforestation-program>

5 City of Ottawa, "2.4 - Maintaining Environmental Integrity," in Official Plan, 2014, <http://ottawa.ca/en/node/1009708#maintaining-environmental-integrity>

6 Economist Intelligence Unit, US and Canada Green City Index



parcs, 1.2 hectares for neighbourhood parks, and 0.8 hectare for nature preserves and habitats). It also sets a maximum 400 metres of walking distance from all high-density and multi-family residences to a greenspace, with a goal of having 92 per cent of residents in high density housing within 400 metres of a park by 2018. The OCP environmental design principles plan greenways to reduce crime.⁷ The city also uses zoning bylaw tools such as gross density zoning and cluster zoning to increase overall on property density if a site has special natural amenities or can contribute open space. For example, the cluster residential zone allows for an increase in maximum unit density from 3.95 units per hectare to five units per hectare for single family dwellings if 50 per cent of the site is preserved as natural open space or retained for park and recreation purposes.⁸

- ii. **Results:** In 2014, 88 per cent of Surrey homes were 400 metres from a park. Park area between 2010 and 2014 increased by 100 hectares.⁹

c. Vancouver

- i. **Initiatives:** Vancouver's urban forest strategy aims to plant 150,000 trees between 2010 and 2020. The city changed the tree bylaw to prevent property owners from cutting down one tree per year. Vancouver's goal is to have all residents living within a five-minute walk of a green space by 2020.¹⁰ The city completed its Rewilding Vancouver plan, which sets out strategies for expanding environmental education programs and documents important wild areas within the city to protect.¹¹
- ii. **Results:** In Vancouver, more than 92 per cent of residents live within a five-minute walk (300 metres) of a park or green space (including greenways, seawalls, mini-parks and natural park spaces around buildings). Between 2010 and 2014, the number of residents living within a five-minute walk from a green space increased by 0.1 per cent (from 92.6 per cent to 92.7 per cent).¹² From 2010 to 2014, the city planted 37,000 trees.

d. Capital Regional District (Victoria, B.C.): Green/blue spaces strategy

- i. **Background:** Since 1997, the CRD has had a strategy to maintain, conserve, rehabilitate and restore green and blue spaces. The plan identifies greenways, green/blue space core areas, renewable resource working landscapes and valuable remnant ecosystems. The strategy was included into the regional growth strategy.
- ii. **Initiatives:** The regional district created a land acquisition fund of \$1.65 million per year,

7 City of Surrey, PlanSurrey 2013 Official Community Plan, 2014, http://www.surrey.ca/bylawsandcouncilibrary/BYL_OCP_18020.pdf

8 City of Surrey, Surrey Zoning By-Law 12000

9 City of Surrey, "Sustainability in Surrey," Sustainability Dashboard, 2014, <http://dashboard.surrey.ca/>

10 City of Vancouver, "Access to Nature," 2015, <http://vancouver.ca/green-vancouver/access-to-nature.aspx#nature-progress>

11 Environmental Education and Stewardship Task Force, Rewilding Vancouver, 2014, <http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/enviromental-education-stewardship-action-plan.pdf>

12 City of Vancouver, "Access to Nature."



funded by a \$10 per-parcel property tax levy for 10 years. The fund purchased 2,687 hectares of parkland from 2001-08. The 2014 regional sustainability strategy draft plans to focus on identifying marine areas to be protected. The strategy also has goal of protecting and managing at least 50 per cent of the growth management planning area land and water base.¹³

International examples of good practices

e. Stockholm

- i. **Background:** Stockholm was planned to have green space wedges extending through urban areas. The city has eight natural and cultural reserves to protect biodiversity and increase residents' access to nature.¹⁴
- ii. **Initiatives:** The city's environmental programs commit to protecting land and water areas of special biological and recreational significance and minimizing and compensating other land and water development. Future park development aims to increase the connectivity of green spaces. Future climate change effects such as sea level rise and increased precipitation must be considered in the development of new green areas. The city has also prioritized increasing water quality in order to offer opportunities for swimming in central Stockholm. The city legally protects high-value green spaces through the national Environmental Code.¹⁵ In 1995, it set aside and legally protected Nationalstadsparken (Royal National City Park) as the world's first national city park, creating protected land and water areas. Stockholm consulted with residents to create "sociotopic" maps of neighbourhood social and cultural values. These maps identify the properties and value of different open spaces within the city.¹⁶
- iii. **Results:** In Stockholm, 90 to 95 per cent of residents live within a five-minute walk (300 metres) of public green areas.¹⁷

f. Oslo

- i. **Initiatives:** Oslo emphasizes blue-green structure, so two-thirds of its total area is covered by protected forest. Its sustainable development strategy designated a green belt boundary and protects green spaces to create blue-green corridors. The Oslo Urban Ecology Programme and environmental management system requires that the city protect and

13 Capital Regional District, State of the Region Report, 2008, <https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/regional-planning-pdf/RGS/2008-state-of-the-region-report.pdf?sfvrsn=0>; Austin Perez, "Victoria," Nature Needs Half, 2012, <http://natureneedshalf.org/victoria/>

14 Stockholms Stad, Stockholm-Application for European Green Capital Award.

15 Stockholms Stad, The Stockholm Environment Programme 2012-2015. <http://www.government.se/legal-documents/2000/08/ds-200061/>

16 Stockholm Stad, Stockholm-Application for European Green Capital Award.

17 European Green Capital, "2010-Stockholm," n.d., <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/winning-cities/2010-stockholm/>



rehabilitate ecosystems, natural habitats and viable stocks of threatened species and make a commitment to rewilding.¹⁸

- ii. **Results:** Within Oslo, 94 per cent of the population is within a 300-metre walk of green space.¹⁹

g. New York City

- i. **Initiatives:** In 2007, the city committed to two goals: that all New Yorkers would live within 10-minute walk to a park and that 90 per cent of waterfront would be open to recreation by 2030. The city aimed to plant one million trees by 2017, including 220,000 street trees mainly in six neighbourhoods that have low tree stocks and high childhood asthma rates.²⁰ The million tree strategy is progressing as a 10-year public-private partnership. The city's Greenstreets program changes unused road areas into green spaces.²¹
- ii. **Results:** By 2013, the city had planted 800,000 trees.²² Within New York, 20 per cent of the city's area is green space.²³

h. Finland

- i. **Initiatives:** The Finnish Harava interactive map-based survey tool for local governments allows organizations to conduct citizen surveys with spatial data to collect feedback and ideas about planning.
- ii. **Results:** The city of Hyvinkää used the program to create a map-based survey for the development of its park maintenance and development plan; respondents marked their favourite paths and evaluated park functionality. The map survey gave the city specific information on park use and allowed residents to express park values.²⁴

18 Perez, "Oslo."

19 Economist Intelligence Unit, European Green City Index, 2009, http://www.siemens.com/entry/cc/features/greencityindex_international/all/en/pdf/report_en.pdf

20 Economist Intelligence Unit, US and Canada Green City Index

21 NYC Parks, "Green Infrastructure," accessed August 1, 2015, <http://www.nycgovparks.org/greening/green-infrastructure>

22 NYC Parks and New York Restoration Project, "About MillionTreesNYC," 2015, <http://www.milliontreesnyc.org/html/about/about.shtml>

23 TD Economics, The Greening of New York City: Lessons from the Big Apple, 2013, <http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/GreeningofNYC.pdf>

24 Harava, "Park Maintenance and Development Plan in Hyvinkää," 2015, <https://www.eharava.fi/en/references/userstories/hyvinkaa/default.aspx>



Advisory services

The **Natural Step Canada (TNSC)** is a national charity whose mission is to tackle climate change and accelerate the transition to a truly sustainable society that thrives within nature's limits. Its academy, advisory services and Sustainability Transition Labs use best-in-class science, systems thinking and facilitation to help individuals and organizations collaborate, solve complex problems, foster innovation, optimize performance and drive systems change.

TNS Canada offers a **Service Cycle for Sustainable Communities** to help municipal governments plan for long-term sustainability and resiliency, embed sustainability into their culture and operations, and engage community stakeholders in their sustainability plans.

To learn more go to: <http://naturalstep.ca/>

The **Whistler Centre for Sustainability (WCS)** is a non-profit organization with the mission to "inspire and facilitate effective planning and meaningful conversations for a better world." WCS provides innovative community engagement, planning and implementation services to local governments across Canada, drawing on its expertise and experience in more than 40 communities. The Centre's work is rooted in future-focused social, environmental and economic values, so that final deliverables embed sustainability throughout.

To learn more go to: <http://whistlercentre.ca>