



BC Local Government Energy Planning Survey

Summary of Results

July 2006



Community Energy
Association

Helping communities benefit from sustainable energy opportunities

BC LOCAL GOVERNMENT ENERGY PLANNING SURVEY

Produced by the Community Energy Association

About the Community Energy Association

The Community Energy Association is a charitable organization assisting BC local governments to promote energy efficiency and alternative energy through community energy planning and project implementation. For contact information and many more local government resources, including a downloadable version of this guide or updated versions, please visit: www.communityenergy.bc.ca. CEA intends to update this guide annually.

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Disclaimer

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada, the Government of British Columbia, or the UBCM.

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Executive Summary

- 47 completed surveys, representing just over 25% of BC local governments.
- Good response distribution in terms of geographic location, population, and type (municipality vs regional district) of local government.
- Energy costs were indicated as the primary driver in regards to energy planning.
- 35% indicated having taken some steps towards developing a community energy/greenhouse gas (GHG) plan.
- Highest levels of current activity were indicated in water conservation, wastewater reduction, waste reduction, and cycling/pedestrian infrastructure.
- Highest levels of interest were indicated in including energy objectives in OCP or bylaws/policies, policies and education to encourage efficiency in buildings, green procurement policies, green fleets and alternative fuels, solar heating and photovoltaics, and ground source heat pumps.
- Major barriers to energy planning and implementation were indicated to be lack of funds and lack of staff time.
- Highest priority indicated for tools and support was for funding guides and funding related assistance.

Introduction

The CEA, with support from UBCM, MoE, and Infrastructure Canada, initiated a survey of energy planning, efficiency, and renewable energy in BC local governments in June 2006. Goals of the survey were to identify:

- the status of various energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives,
- potential best practice examples for showcasing across the province,
- interest in undertaking various actions,
- perceived barriers to implementation of energy-related initiatives, and
- most useful types of support.

The survey was web-based, although a paper version was available. It was distributed to Chief Administrative Officers in all BC municipalities and regional districts by both e-mail and fax. Respondents were given four weeks to complete the survey, with a reminder e-mail sent out after two weeks. To encourage participation, five books on sustainable planning were offered as draw prizes.

It should be noted that there are significant limits on the statistical accuracy of a survey of this type. Due to the small sample size, response rate, and lack of randomness (respondents are likely to have some interest in the subject if they respond) the results cannot be extrapolated to the overall population of local governments. In addition, the survey typically represents the views of one person within the local government. However, the survey does have considerable value in addressing the survey goals.

The results of this survey will help the Community Energy Association and its partners better serve local governments by providing appropriate tools and assistance, and sharing best practices amongst local governments throughout the province.

Response to the Survey

CEA received 55 responses, 51 of which were completed online with the rest sent in by fax. Of these, five respondents only completed the contact information, and didn't answer any of the questions. A further three only responded to the first page of questions (Energy Planning). Therefore there were 47 completed surveys, representing 46 local governments (one municipality submitted two complete surveys). This represents just over 25% of BC's municipalities and regional districts. A response rate of 30% is generally strived for, but given the length and complexity of this survey, 25% should be considered quite good.

Distribution of the respondents was quite good in terms of government type, geographic location, and population. Of the completed surveys, 40 were from municipalities, while the remaining seven were from regional districts or other entities. Responses were fairly evenly distributed between small communities with a population of less than 5,000, medium-sized communities between 5,000 and 25,000, and larger communities over 25,000. In terms of geographic location, approximately one quarter of surveys came from each of the Lower Mainland, Central Interior, and Vancouver Island. The remainder were split between the Kootenays and Northern BC.

Summary of Results

The survey is divided into four sections; Energy Planning Issues, Activities, Barriers, and CEA Tools and Support. Key results from each section are highlighted below. Complete results for all survey questions is given in the Appendix.

Energy Planning Issues

Virtually all respondents indicated some interest in energy planning or energy efficiency/renewable energy initiatives. This is not surprising, due to the inherent bias of those who are likely to respond to the survey (see Introduction above). Of these, 40% indicated being very interested.

Far and away the primary driver with respect to energy planning is indicated as energy costs; this was selected by 88% of respondents. Other key drivers are air quality, greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction, and economic development. Only 22% of respondents currently consider energy planning in terms of economic development, but over half are interested in the potential of local renewable energy as part of an economic development strategy, and nearly three-quarters indicated energy prices will have an impact on future economic development.

Activities

The activities section was the largest in the survey. Its goals were to identify what actions have been taken or are underway in communities, potential best practices, and potential interest.

35% of respondents indicated having taken some steps towards completing a community energy or GHG action plan. However, only one community indicated the plan was complete. As well, three-quarters of those who have not taken any action on a plan are interested in doing so.

Areas with the highest levels of activity (in the 60 – 80% range) are some of those with indirect links to energy: water conservation, wastewater reduction, waste reduction, and cycling/pedestrian infrastructure. This is possibly due to these areas traditionally having been perceived by local governments as more of a direct responsibility than other energy-related issues.

Areas with lower levels of local government activity, but the highest levels of potential interest indicated are:

- including energy objectives in OCP or bylaws/policies
- energy efficiency in buildings, particularly policies and education
- green procurement policies
- green fleets and alternative fuels
- solar heating and photovoltaics
- ground source heat pumps

The areas indicated as being of least interest are :

- hiring an energy manager
- district heating
- use of landfill gas

Comments received indicated the lack of interest in landfill gas may be due to it usually being the jurisdiction of the regional district. Most of the regional district responses showed potential interest or that some action had already been taken.

Barriers

The major barriers to energy planning and projects are indicated as a lack of funds and a lack of staff time. The next most significant barriers, somewhat related to the first one, are an unwillingness to borrow funds and difficulty finding funding partners. Other lesser barriers include projects not being considered cost-effective, a lack of knowledge by council or staff, and the perceived risks involved in new technologies. A lack of interest by council is not indicated as a major barrier.

CEA Tools and Support

Again, funding issues are indicated as being at the forefront of local government concerns, with 70% considering a guide to energy-related funding to be very useful. This was followed by assistance in securing funding at 57%. Other types of support considered most useful by respondents are a guide on alternative energy technologies, case studies, and on-the-ground assistance. None of the tools and supports is indicated as not useful, although support in developing an energy/GHG baseline had the lowest level of support.

About one quarter of respondents are very interested in presentations to council, staff training, or community workshops. No particular preference is indicated between the three types of outreach. The top area of interest in receiving assistance is in funding opportunities. There is little interest in help with hiring an energy manager.

Appendix

Results

Survey

CEA Brochure