

Infrastructure Canada | Smart Cities Challenge

Oxford County, Blandford-Blenheim, East Zorra-Tavistock, Ingersoll, Norwich, South-West Oxford, Tillsonburg, Woodstock, Zorra

Applicant information

Question 5

Please describe how your community residents have shaped your Challenge Statement. Describe your plans for continuing to engage and involve them in your final proposal going forward.

This section should include:

- Descriptions of previous engagement with residents, businesses, organizations, and other stakeholders on topics related to the Challenge Statement.
- Descriptions of feedback that came to light through past engagement processes.
- Links between the Challenge Statement and engagement feedback.

Four years in the making, Oxford County's challenge statement is underpinned by the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan vision: "A vibrant, prosperous, and responsible Oxford for all."

This statement is at the core of the many initiatives the County is currently pursuing, including 100% renewable energy by 2050, zero poverty, and zero waste.

The Plan and its vision are the product of a grassroots community campaign undertaken in 2014 and 2015. The goals and targets under the Plan's three pillars—community, economy and environment—were arrived at through "face to face" citizen engagement at World Cafes, information meetings, and "kitchen table" collaborations, as well as through online engagement tools like crowdsourcing, comment forms and a wiki.

Since the Plan's release, Oxford has reached out to its citizens at every turn on its path towards sustainability. Of particular relevance to its mission of building transformation, the County:

- Released its draft 100% Renewable Energy Plan to the community for comment, and has continued to work with its community liaison group, Smart Energy Oxford, to explore incentives for renewable energy, retrofits, zero-energy homes, passive housing, and other advanced low-carbon strategies. The Community Energy Survey in 2017 and the resulting Solar Oxford Challenge are outcomes of this work.
- Oxford County's municipal budget process included a community survey for 2016 and 2017 to allow residents to identify their priorities. Survey results for this past year showed that just over 75% of respondents believed the County's investment in community sustainability initiatives should be maintained or enhanced. Several comments expressed a sense of pride that the County is taking a leadership role in this area.
- Further, roughly 66% of budget survey respondents said community housing investment should be maintained or enhanced. Residents expressed knowledge and empathy for this issue through comments such as, "Housing is the base to community health, vitality and economy. In order for Oxford County to thrive, residents MUST have safe and affordable housing. Without housing you cannot sustain employment and other basic human needs."

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of efforts made to be inclusive and to represent the community's diversity. • Plans to sustain engagement through the development and implementation of the final proposal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public input on housing and homelessness in 2013 formed the basis of the County's 10-Year Shelter Plan, now updated annually. As the County's community housing policies have grown more sophisticated, its relationship with developers has also evolved, with the County actively working with developers to introduce Passive House standard to all municipal housing builds. The Blossom Park project is a landmark example of how stakeholder engagement and partnerships are making the ambitious aims of the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan achievable. Oxford County Council has already committed to a "Housing First" policy, in which proceeds from sales of surplus County-owned real property are redeveloped or reinvested to meet the growing demand for housing. Oxford County's most impactful community engagement investment has been the Oxford Community Wellbeing Survey, undertaken with the University of Waterloo's Canadian Index of Wellbeing's research team. Oxford County is leading the way in this engagement. As one of only six Canadian municipalities to undertake the CIW based Community Wellbeing Survey Oxford has taken it a step further by correlating the Community Wellbeing Survey to the Future Oxford plan and using the survey data as a basis on which to assess our sustainability baseline from which we will set our targets and milestones and an ongoing monitoring program to track progress towards our sustainability vision. • Carried out in 2016, the survey of 11,335 randomly selected households (representing 25% of Oxford County's population) offered valuable insight into the determinants of wellbeing among our citizens, particularly for our most vulnerable populations. These insights validated the priorities laid out in the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan and further reinforced the connectedness of our community's social/community, economic and environmental needs. <p>The final survey, available at CommunityOxford.ca, showed us that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Respondents in the lowest income category (less than \$40,000 annually) reported poorer quality of life on community engagement, accessibility, quality of work, health behaviours and perceptions, and environmental concerns. – Within a three-month period, respondents in the lowest income category were unable to pay their mortgage or rent 5.6% of the time; ate less, or didn't have enough money for food 20.6% of the time; and were unable to pay for other necessities 27.1% of the time. – Only 49.2% of respondents in the lowest income category reported very good or excellent mental health. – 84.7% of respondents in the lowest income category believe that have a personal responsibility to protect the environment. This data tells us three important things: those in the lowest
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income category have worse mental health outcomes than others, have difficulties paying their bills, and feel a sense of responsibility when it comes to the environment. This evidence has driven our Smart Cities approach to development by tackling affordability, health and wellness and environmental sustainability through one core concept: housing.

- Public engagement is an ongoing process in Oxford County, and includes monthly Speakers Series, participating in community-wide events and multiple Future Oxford committee meetings, principally led by community leaders and supported by Oxford County.