



# SOME IDEAS (HUMBLY PRESENTED)

**T**o be visionary, an initiative must be imaginative and unique to competing jurisdictions. It must also be sustainable absent subsidies, require broad-based public support and have an effective communications plan. People must understand and believe in what they are being asked to support. Furthermore, any such initiative must be capable of producing measurable benefits over the short, medium and longer terms. Short-term benefits are essential for garnering political support while the medium and longer term benefits would ensure that investors and the community achieve real and lasting financial and other results.

By way of caveat: The purpose here is not to be critical of any particular existing public policy initiative. It is rather to try and create a marquee for the region, some thing(s) for which the community clearly stands and becomes known internationally, a brand if you like.

Idea # 1: Take an existing rural town or village anywhere in Atlantic Canada and turn it into the greenest community on the planet.

This could be accomplished in the form of a regional contest. To be eligible, the applying community must have, let's say, less than 10,000 residents. To win, the community must have the support of the local council and, most importantly, its citizens. The winning jurisdiction will have held local meetings, maybe even a plebiscite, to develop a comprehensive plan on how to implement a municipality-wide green strategy. The extent of those undertakings and the evidence of local commitment would be the criteria for judging the winning bid.

Strategies would include energy use at the individual level (such as personal transportation), at the household level (including home heating and energy efficiency), and at the community level (could include power sources, garbage collection/disposal and sustainable technologies).

Provincial government participation would appear in the form of tax breaks for new businesses which establish in the winning jurisdiction in order to take advantage of the various strategies — monitoring and learning from their progress. Education criteria for the local school(s) would be amended to include a huge component of the ways to achieve both a green and benign footprint and the advantages of doing so.

Federal government participation could be in form of a one-time grant to be invested in specific green initiatives (these could range from converting local gasoline consumption

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Illustration: Iain Keith Murray

to natural gas, to investments in new energy sources). Funds would be allocated to the initiative which provides the most impact for the buck. I believe that \$10 million would be a sufficient investment (remember, these are small communities and impact is what's important).

As for the massive PR and marketing campaign that would be required, it would be developed via a partnership between both levels of government.

Stage one of the program would measure everything: what type of energy is used and how; current levels of appreciation for the impact of CO2 emissions; what constitutes sustainability and what is not sustainable. A huge learning curve would be generated just by the measurement, collection and dissemination of all this information and data.

Any business, anywhere on the planet, invested in the green and sustainable space would simply have to be aware of and interested in this project: companies trying to figure out which heat pumps work best, bicycle manufacturers, electric car companies, insulation companies, education institutions and foundations interested in the green space — the list goes on. The process would even become a tourist attraction.

Now think of the benefits to the community and its residents. By definition we are restricting this to rural Atlantic Canada where jobs are scarce and young people impossible to retain, forget attracting. That changes in an instant.

Just imagine the buzz this would create locally and globally for Shelburne, Nova Scotia, or St. Stephen, New Brunswick or Marystown, Newfoundland: "Oh yes, isn't that the community trying to be the greenest community on the planet?"

Of course there will be naysayers and problem residents (there always are). That's just part of the change process.

Space restricts me from expanding further. But in a way, that's the point. I want the community to debate this and if the result is that a better idea is found, then that's all to the better. We need big picture policy objectives. We need to stand for something, something we can all believe in and be proud of and most importantly we have to find a reason for our young people to stay in their communities.

Next issue, Idea # 2. | ABM

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of Atlantic Business Magazine. Feedback: [dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com](mailto:dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com)