

1.3 Cities and Communities

Introduction

Canadians are citizens of one country, but we live our lives in thousands of different communities. The diversity and sharing within and between our communities is the source of our richness and strength as a nation.

The anchor of these communities are the public spaces that we share: schools, libraries, community centres, parks, main streets, local businesses and cooperatives, markets, workplaces, recreation centres, playgrounds, public transit, health centres, places of worship, organizations, civic spaces, rivers, wild spaces, and even virtual media spaces.

These are the places where we share our lives with others, and they are the places that make us strong. Without these public spaces, we have no society: the sum of us is vastly greater than our parts. This is the foundation we need to build upon.

Canadians have been blessed with a bountiful land with a vast wealth of natural resources. This has allowed us to build a society and communities that are the envy of many in the world. But, through inappropriate development, we are

increasingly wasting our wealth and squandering our resources.

For our communities to grow and prosper, we need more public and community spaces. Above all, our communities need to be healthy and accessible to all.

If some in our society are excluded, we all lose out. Those who are excluded are denied the opportunity to live their lives to the fullest; the rest of us are denied their contributions. Unfortunately, underinvestment, growing inequality, and increased privatization have made our public spaces weaker and increasingly inaccessible. And the situation is getting worse:

- The municipal public infrastructure deficit is over \$120 billion.
- The gap between the rich and the rest of us has increased.
- Real wages of most workers have barely increased in the past 20 years.
- Corporate profits have escalated to ever-increasing record levels.
- Income disparity between communities is increasing.

Statistics don't tell the whole story. Falling bridges, crumbling community buildings, over-worked families, and ghettoized communities really bring the story home.

Cuts to social programs, combined with privatization and deregulation, contributed to these problems and continue to hold back communities from reaching their potential. In many rural and urban areas across Canada, local communities and economies are suffering. Fortunately, we still have a wealth of skilled and passionate people who work hard in and for their communities. Across Canada, these people have already helped counter decline by pushing for policies and programs that put local communities and their socioeconomic well-being first. However, these efforts to rebuild and revitalize need the federal government's support.

We must start from the community level, supported by a new positive national vision and leadership. The new approach should follow a community economic development approach that recognizes and builds upon community strengths.

It will require a coordinated vision, and a set of tools and building blocks to rebuild and strengthen our communities. A number of these steps are outlined below.

Department of Communities

The federal government has departments for health, industry, transportation, finance, agriculture, natural resources, and other areas, but it has no department responsible for communities and cities — which are so central to the quality of our lives.

Federal programs focused on communities are spread over many different departments and agencies, which has resulted in a scattered and ineffective approach, prone to local political interference and nepotism. We need a coherent, comprehensive, and effective approach that is transparent, responsive, and accountable to the public.

The AFB will establish a federal Department of Communities with a senior minister. It will be responsible for administering a series of programs and reforms to: 1) re-invest and renew

TABLE 6 A Cities and Communities Strategy

Vision	Tools	Building Blocks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Department of Communities</i> to include: Communities and Infrastructure programs and research, Regional Development Agencies; Rural Communities Secretariat, CMHC, Housing and Homelessness programs, Social Economy Initiative, responsibility for co-operative and community-based climate change and adaptation work. • <i>National Communities Strategy</i>: would involve a participatory and inclusive approach, coordinate interdepartmental teams, with an emphasis on extension work, sustainable development and building community capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Futures and new community economic development programs. • Public Assets Office: mandate to work with communities to maximize benefits of public programs and assets. • Responsibility for and ownership of federal government building, lands and other properties. • Procurement strategy for local development. • Tax incentives for community economic development investments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Communities Fund financed with transfer of the equivalent of one percentage point from the GST. • Green Public Transit Supplement. • Funding for Community Economic Development Corporations, including NRCs, CDCs and EDCs. • Regional Economic Development funding • Gas Tax funding • Public Infrastructure funding • Affordable Housing and CMHC Program Funding

public infrastructure and community spaces; and 2) support and promote a Community Economic Development (CED) strategy to provide marginalized communities with the resources and tools they need to reverse increasing regional inequality.

It will develop a National Communities Strategy and coordinate federal urban initiatives in Canadian communities, including funding for infrastructure. It will also provide Canadian communities with a single point of access to the federal government on municipal and community issues and facilitate the exchange of local best-practices.

National Communities Strategy

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges facing Canadian communities, there is the need for a national vision that articulates the importance and strength of our communities and local economies. This strategy will outline a strategic plan and supports to provide local communities and economies with the tools they need to succeed, and will provide direction for all government departments. The National Communities Strategy will be developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the public, municipalities, workers, unions, social service agencies, civil society organizations, and businesses.

Public Assets Office

The federal government has significant property holdings in communities all across Canada. These are important public assets that should not be privatized as the current federal government is doing through asset sales, public-private partnerships (P3s), contracting-out, and other forms of privatization.

Privatization and P3s cost the public much more, reduce accountability, increase risk, and

severely limit the ability to use these assets in the best interests of the local community.

The new Department of Communities will create a Public Assets Office, which will work with communities to maximize the benefits of public programs and assets and identify community needs.

Retaining public ownership of federal real property assets is key to this initiative as it provides the federal government with a major tool to promote positive change in communities all across Canada.

Government Procurement

The Department of Communities will implement a federal procurement strategy promoting ethical purchasing based on accounting principles that account for the social, environmental, and economic costs and benefits of procurement decisions. This policy will be structured in a similar manner as the federal government's "Policy on Green Procurement" and will be modeled after several other successful initiatives such as the Manitoba Government's Aboriginal Set-Aside procurement initiative and the social enterprise procurement policies of the cities of Vancouver, Toronto, and Calgary.

Community Economic Development Programs

The 2008 AFB will restore the Social Economy Initiative funding and extend program funding for three years. The Social Economy Initiative was a \$132 million program that was instituted by the previous government as a "down payment" of support for this sector. The following CED programs will be funded through the restoration of this program:

What is Community Economic Development?

Community Economic Development (CED) is local action that creates economic opportunities and enhances the social and environmental conditions in communities. It recognizes that sustainable development requires an integrated approach to complex community problems. Strategic priorities for targeted communities include structural economic change, local ownership of resources, social development, environmental stewardship, labour market development, and access to capital.

CED encourages community members to take charge of their neighbourhoods through systematic renewal that is conceived and directed locally. CED is a complement to a strong system of social programs and requires a centralized government body to fund, support and coordinate the integration of CED into the different government departments, and to act as a convener for the CED sector. CED, in tandem with renewed and restored government investment in public infrastructure and social programs, can provide solutions to increasing inequality and poverty in targeted regions.

Social enterprises are small businesses that are formed for a social purpose, such as providing training and employment for at risk youth, as their primary goal. Social enterprise is a valuable tool for combating social exclusion and building the confidence of marginalized individuals. Profits generated by Social Enterprises are generally reinvested in services and programming complementary to its social and community goals.

Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations and Community Development Corporations

The AFB will work with other levels of government to establish and support a national network of Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations (NRCs) and Community Development Corporations (CDCs). These are non-profit, community-led organizations that act as central coordinating bodies for projects aimed at promoting stability, capacity building, economic development and well-being. NRCs are responsible for assuring that projects

are in line with neighbourhood plans generated by community stakeholders and to provide resources to community partners. CDCs are generally more focused on job creation and asset development for community members.

The CDC and NRC network will distribute a federal grant for community-specific CED research and capacity building projects, with CDCs and NRCs having discretion regarding the allocation of funds in their respective jurisdictions.

As part of this, the AFB will expand program investments in community-based poverty reduction initiatives run by non-profit CED organizations to tackle concentrated social and economic disadvantage in rural, northern, Aboriginal, and urban settings.

Employment Development Corporations

The AFB will reallocate existing funding to employment development organizations, and will specifically target this funding to programs that promote holistic development for marginalized unemployed individuals to improve their chances of entering and remaining in the labour force. Current funding criteria often focus on narrow hard skills, even though experience demonstrates that broad based support — including life skills, hard skills, placement, aftercare, child care, and transportation — is most effective.

Social Enterprise Trust

The AFB will create a specialized long-term patient capital fund with expertise in financing non-profit and cooperative community enterprises for the rest of Canada.

The fund will be used to leverage additional investments from foundations and other institutional investors. This will include infrastructure and measures to promote accountability, learning, business development, after-loan care, and communications. This setup has proven successful in growing social enterprises and sustainable start-ups with very low loan loss rates.

Cooperatives

The AFB will expand the Co-operative Development Initiative to increase support for co-operatives, particularly in the area of co-operative formation as a means to combat economic decline in marginalized communities.

A key goal of CED is to promote a more democratic economy through a more equitable distribution of economic assets. Worker, consumer, and producer co-operatives promote shared community ownership of economic assets, and are valuable tools to counter community economic decline and capital flight.

Infrastructure Funding Back on Track

The Conservative government has continued to fund infrastructure programs, but has altered its focus away from sustainable growth and towards the promotion of privatization, commerce and trade. The AFB will put public funds to work to meet public and community needs first.

Key new initiatives in this area include:

Building Communities Fund

The AFB will transfer the equivalent of 1% from the Goods and Services Tax (approx-

imately \$6 billion a year) to communities across Canada for public infrastructure and energy efficiency projects to rebuild schools, hospitals, transit, water, sewer, and other community infrastructure. This will reverse the 2008 GST cut on July 1, 2008 and redirect billions of dollars into improving our infrastructure — thereby also taking the pressure off local property taxes and user fees. The funding will provide the investments necessary to eliminate the municipal public infrastructure deficit, assist communities in meeting the challenge of climate change, and help to build a green economy for the 21st century.

Green Public Transit Supplement

Investment in public transit is an efficient and effective mechanism to reduce carbon emissions and must be a priority. The AFB will use a portion of the carbon tax (*see Environment chapter*) to allocate \$2.4 billion over three years to enhance public transit infrastructure and make public transit more affordable for all.