

Actions for Sustainability: Past Examples

Background

In the 2010s, many co-ops across Canada took a renewed interest in their governance, management and missions. The 2020 Vision Program provided a framework and resources to help with those efforts and also included a focus on long-term planning and sustainability. CHF BC noted a number of activities co-ops cited when reviewing their environmental performance from that time.

Here are some examples clustered in several (overlapping) areas with some more recent additions suggested by staff.

Develop Sustainable Programming

- Form a “Green Committee” (for education, or to monitor opportunities for retrofit programs and grants from utilities).
- Develop “Green Procurement Procedures” (to consider how the co-op can incorporate options with smaller environmental impacts when upgrading building components).
- Complete the Building Energy Audit initiative through CHF BC and train members to annually report on the status of green initiatives.
- Calculate the Co-op’s carbon footprint.
- Provide energy audits of units for members who request them.
- Donate free parking space to the local car co-op or other car-sharing organization.
- Use the co-op newsletter to publish tips on how to save money and improve sustainability.
- Promote member uptake of the Energy Conservation Assistance Program (ECAP).
- Encourage and support cycling by having a bike room and/or installing bike racks.
- Encourage car-pooling and support public transportation.
- Encourage members to recycle, through various programs (e.g., municipal pick-up or on-site efforts).
- Encourage members to switch to compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) or LED lighting in their homes (including offering CFL giveaways to members).
- Encourage eco-friendly cleaning during co-op clean-up days or generally.
- Encourage use of cold water in the common laundry room.
- Encourage avoidance of electric driers by giving away free retractable clothesline to members.
- Discourage *en suite* laundry facilities, but instead offer high-efficiency laundry machines in a common facility.
- Plant new trees in green spaces (to sequester carbon dioxide, and to provide summer shade to keep co-op homes at comfortable temperatures without air conditioning).

Improve Waste Management

- Establish or expand on-site composting (household compostable waste bins, municipal green waste bins for landscaping waste, open yard waste bins for other leaves and grass clippings).
- Recycle paper, plastic, glass, metal, and building materials (e.g., metal removed from the building, such as pipes and appliances; wood beams to be used in composting system; old pavement in landscaping)
- Institute co-mingled recycling program to improve diversion from land-fill disposal.
- Re-use furnishings and other household goods by making them available to others (laundry “free box” or annual trading days).
- Collect electronics and batteries for best reuse or disposal, separate from co-op garbage (e.g., bring in steel walk-in bins in the spring, one for household items and the other for electronic items for recycling; hire a independent contractor to remove large appliances and water tanks and take them to scrap metal yard to be recycled).
- Participate in Annual Earth Day or other co-op clean-up events.

Reduce Unnecessary Water Consumption and Improve Water Management

- Replace or repair any leaky taps and pipes.
- Replace toilets with new low-flush toilets.
- Install low-flow showers (all in one go or gradually).
- Install aerators in faucets.
- Install water catchment bins to sustain landscaping on co-op grounds.
- Replace impermeable asphalt (e.g., parking lot pavements) with permeable surfaces.
- In gardens, use native plants that don’t need to be watered as much as lawns and which provide habitats for native animal species.

Reduce Demand for New Resource Extraction and the Creation of Non-biodegradable or Toxic Materials

- Repair, rather than replace, appliances (whenever possible).
- Limit the number of documents (agendas, minutes, etc.) distributed to directors on the co-op board, to committees and to office staff.
- Reuse envelopes in the office and purchase organic printer ink.
- Use eco-friendly janitorial supplies.
- Use only water-based paint (paint that emits no/minimal volatile organic compounds).
- Purchase paints and other construction products that are environmentally friendly (e.g., by using recycled materials).
- Refinish wood floors with a water-based finish.
- Replace common area carpets with a 100%-recycled product.
- Construct fences from recycled wood preserved with bio-degradable products.
- Request that no scents be used in the co-op common laundry room.
- Permit no smoking in common areas. Or throughout the whole co-op.

- Institute a “no industrially produced chemicals on our gardens” policy (no pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers).
- Use peat, steer manure and compost for amending the soil.
- Host a common kitchen in the co-op common room through a community group which teaches economic, nutritious food preparation (reducing the use of pre-packaged food).
- Create raised vegetable gardens or host community gardens on co-op property (locally grown food reduces the need for transportation and packaging).
- Use electric lawn and landscaping equipment as opposed to gas-powered alternatives. Or use hand-powered equipment instead.

Improve Energy Efficiency

- Connect external or laundry room lights to photocells or timers (to reduce energy use when lighting is not needed).
- Change “EXIT” signs to LED models.
- Use LED holiday lights on timers to minimize electrical consumption.
- Retrofit exterior, hallway, laundry room and parkade lighting (e.g., convert underground and stairwell fluorescent light fixtures from T8 to T4).
- Turn off the heating system throughout the building during the summer months.
- Replace inefficient appliances with Energy Star-rated models.
- Use variable speed make-up air units to conserve energy.
- Use a recirculation pump on the hot water tank.
- Use a manual push lawn mower to cut the grass.
- Provide energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs to members’ units.
- Install programmable thermostats in all units heated with a furnace.
- Install low-emissivity (low-e) argon gas-filled energy-efficient windows.
- Heat units with a hot water system.
- Insulate the underground garage door with plastic to reduce heat loss.
- Install high efficiency (e.g., R50) and environmentally sensitive insulation in attics when replacing roofs.
- Clean dryer vents regularly to improve efficiency.
- Install screen doors to allow members to keep units cool with natural air circulation rather than air conditioning.
- Use power bars with switches so common area appliances do not use electricity when idle.

Investigate New Technologies

- Install solar panels on building roofs (or investigate the potential benefits of doing so).
- Investigate subsidies for programmable thermostats and other energy-efficient retrofits.
- Explore the possibility of connecting the Co-op to a neighbourhood energy utility.
- Explore more sustainable de-icing options for winter.
- Investigate more energy-efficient heating sources or more flexible climate control systems (e.g., heat pumps compared to electric baseboard heating)