



## Green Event Planning Guide

January 4, 2016

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*Cyclists and pedestrians arriving at a car-free event in Esquimalt Gorge Park*

## Introduction

This guide was created for the event planner who wants to host a green event but is unsure where to begin. The Township of Esquimalt's Environmental Advisory Committee and staff have put together this guide to share the knowledge and experience they have gained through their collective research and experience in greening events. Initially, the guide was being developed for Township staff and event planners for events taking place in Esquimalt. After meeting with event planners it became apparent that the enclosed information is also valuable to anyone planning an event in the capital region.

The guide was designed to cover every aspect of event planning, including:

- Deciding on the event venue and how it impacts transportation planning
- Procuring the equipment and materials that are required for the event
- Selecting the type of food served at the event
- Developing a strategy to reduce waste and collect recyclable and compostable materials
- Implementing a communication strategy to promote the green practices of your event

We understand that event planners are busy and may lack the time and resources to consider measures to make their event green. It is for this reason we have included resources and templates that may be used by event planners. Resources include: a checklist of activities to complete before, during and after the event; listing of local resources to help you with planning a green event; and templates for communicating your green event practices to volunteers, vendors and the public. To view and download the green event resources, please visit: [www.esquimalt.ca/greenevents](http://www.esquimalt.ca/greenevents).

If implementing green goals in all areas outlined in this guide is not feasible for your event then begin with a few actions in your first year. Through practice and experience you will be able to add new green initiatives to your event each year.

### What's a green event?

A green event is an event that minimizes negative impacts on the environment and human health and is guided by the following principles:

- Conserve energy and natural resources
- Minimize waste
- Promote alternative transportation
- Prioritize healthy, fair-traded and sustainable food alternatives

## Venue & Transportation

One of the first decisions you will make when planning an event is its location. Some sites may complement the green goals of your event better than others. The sustainable practices already in place at the venue could help to make the planning of your green event easier.

### Venue

When selecting a venue consider the environmental practices of the building and operator.

- Sustainable food choices of venue's catering services
- Energy performance of building (e.g. LEED certification)
- Environmental practices of venue operator (e.g. recycling/composting, carbon neutrality)
- Protection of sensitive natural environments (for outdoor events)



*Signage promoting solar hot water is posted in the washrooms at the Esquimalt Municipal Hall*

## Transportation

Once a venue has been selected, a transportation plan should be developed for all participants, volunteers and support staff attending the event. Below are suggestions for transportation to and from the event as well as how to communicate the availability of these options.

- Venue distance from local accommodations and event vendors
- Walkability to venue
- Cycling infrastructure (e.g. cycling routes, bike lock-up)
- Transit service routes nearby and scheduled service
- Post transit route, schedule and consider distributing transit passes to participants
- Encourage carpooling
- If there is limited on-site parking, consider offering a shuttle bus service
- Have participants sign-up for transportation options during event registration
- Establish a load-in schedule to reduce congestion and idling during event setup
- Always communicate transportation options in all event promotions (e.g. posters, website, media releases)
- Consider offering incentives, prizes or recognition for participants who walk, cycle, or take transit
- Post recommended cycling route to event and signage directing cyclists to bike parking
- Provide secure bike lock-up service (ideally covered)
- Communicate the environmental impact of different modes of transportation to participants



*Bike lock-up at the Centennial Community Celebration in Gorge Park.*

## Equipment & Materials

As an event planner you will have to procure equipment and materials for your event. It is important to consider the impact of your purchasing practices on the environment. Green procurement practices should prioritize conserving resources, reusing materials and reducing waste.

### Conserve Resources

- Select products that use fewer resources, are made from recycled materials or materials sourced locally or otherwise have a smaller environmental footprint
- Energy efficient and greenhouse gas friendly options for lighting, heating and equipment are chosen when available
- For entertainment, consider an acoustic jam, open mic or an art display from local artists
- Use natural materials for decorating such as pine cones, shells, local flowers and potted plants

### Reusable Materials

- Reusable or recyclable nametags
- Reusable event signage
- Reusable dry-erase boards, blackboards or electronic projectors are used instead of paper flip charts
- Purchase decorations and props that can be reused at future events or consider renting them
- Partner with other event organizers to share reusable materials

### Reduce Waste

- Use electronic methods where possible (e.g. online registration)
- When printing cannot be avoided, print all documents double-sided
- When printing use post-consumer recycled paper
- Brochures, handouts and session notes are distributed electronically or left out to be collected by those with a genuine interest (as opposed to being stuffed in bags or folders)

### Trash or *Treasure*?

Gift bags, swag and other 'free' give-aways have become a staple of most events. If you are hoping to green your event you may want to consider the following:

- When fundraising for prizes, contact local, independent businesses first
- Pick prizes and give-aways that have a low environmental impact, are ethically sourced (e.g. fair trade), and serve a useful purpose.

## Food

Food that is served at the event, and the waste it can generate, are some of the most visible signs of your green event efforts. For example, don't let your green efforts be overshadowed by food being served in styrofoam take-out containers.

### Plan

Develop a food services plan so you can anticipate what types of food and serving ware will be at the event. The plan will help with estimating the number and type of waste re-sortation stations you will need to have on-site.

- Approach food suppliers and service providers who have already adopted green practices
- When booking vendors let them know right away that you are planning a green event
- Create a vendor agreement, or specify in vendor contracts, green practices that the vendor must agree to (e.g. vendors may only serve food using compostable products)
- You may want to offer incentives to vendors who voluntarily participate instead of demanding these practices (e.g. reduced or waived vendor fee)
- Through vendor agreement or contract require that vendors bringing their own bins for sorting compostable and recyclable materials during food preparation
- Prepare a food, beverage and merchandise sales plan in advance which includes vendor name, location, products for sale and materials for disposal (resources available at [www.esquimalt.ca/greenevents](http://www.esquimalt.ca/greenevents))
- Assist vendors by providing training, educational brochures and contacts for sourcing compostable serving ware (resources available at [www.esquimalt.ca/greenevents](http://www.esquimalt.ca/greenevents))
- Create signage recognizing vendors green practices (e.g. 100% compostable products)

## Food & Beverage Choices

When selecting food and beverages to serve at your event, consider the following choices:

- Seasonal and locally sourced food
- Fair trade and organic coffee and teas
- Organic or locally made beverages (e.g. juice, milk, wine, beer, ciders)
- Serve "Best Choice" sustainable seafood as indicated in the Sustainable Seafood Guide at [www.SeaChoice.org](http://www.SeaChoice.org)
- Check if water fountains are available, if not serve water in pitchers or large dispensers
- For larger events, contact the CRD to check availability of the mobile drinking water cart
- Promote the use of reusable water bottles and tap water



- During registration, have guests state their meal preferences and dietary requirements
- Consider serving a vegetarian meal or having at least one vegetarian meal option
- Post information on the sustainable qualities of the food being served

## Food Waste

The most effective way to succeed at diverting waste from your event is to reduce the amount of waste that's generated in the first place.

- Eliminate the need for serving ware by selecting finger foods whenever possible
- Encourage or select serving ware (e.g. plates, cups, cutlery) according to this order of priority: 1) reusable, 2) compostable, and 3) recyclable
- Purchase food and condiments in bulk to reduce packaging waste (e.g. cream, sugar, ketchup, salt, pepper) and try to avoid plastic coffee stirrers and drinking straws



*CRD mobile drinking water cart provides cold and filtered water at large community events*

## Waste Diversion

One of the most common goals of planning a green event is to minimize waste. Developing a waste management plan for your event will help to ensure maximum capture rates of compost and recyclable material and minimum levels of waste going to the landfill. The biggest barrier to achieving the goal of waste reduction is cross-contamination. Cross-contamination occurs when compost, recyclable or waste material is placed in the wrong bin and often results in the entire contents of the bin being sent to the landfill. The process of sorting cross-contaminated bins is too costly for a waste management company to undertake so the responsibility is left with the event organizer.

### Materials

To divert as much waste from the landfill as possible you will need to plan on having bins available to collect some or all of the following materials:

#### Composting – Organic Material

Modern composting facilities collect a wider range of organic material for processing than most people expect (e.g. soiled paper plates). Therefore, it's important to list the accepted materials very clearly on the bin.

#### Refundable – Beverage Containers with Deposits

The separate collection of ready-to-drink beverage containers is an opportunity to partner with a not-for-profit organization to help with waste diversion efforts management in exchange for all returnable materials. Local boy scouts and sports teams are often interested in collecting refundable containers as part of their fundraising efforts.

#### Recycling – Hard Plastics, Metal and Glass

These items can get mixed in with other waste streams, so watch to ensure that they are recovered.

#### Recycling – Paper

Paper products at events are generally soiled with food and suitable for composting. Most events will find they do not recover much paper and newspaper to require a separate paper bin as the compost bin may be used for a small amount of paper collection.

#### Recycling – Cardboard

Cardboard is usually only a waste stream produced by vendors. Cardboard can be collected from the vendors and placed in a central waste collection site or alternatively ask vendors to take the cardboard off site with them. Similar to paper, it may not be worthwhile to have a dedicated bin for cardboard at re-sortation stations throughout the site.

#### Recycling – Miscellaneous

Miscellaneous materials may include soft plastics\*, styrofoam\*, batteries and other recyclable products. These products may be difficult to identify ahead of time for most events. You may choose to have targeted recycling for some types of materials that are unique to your event. You may also choose to have a public site where these rare materials are collected for recycling as an awareness and educational opportunity.

*\* Items which may be disposed as garbage, all other items are banned from Hartland Landfill*

## Landfill – Waste

The last resort! Once items have been sorted for recycling or compost there should not be much material going in this bin.

## Bins

Collection bins should be appropriately sized, sturdy and have a lid, particularly for outdoor events where inclement weather and pests (e.g. wasps) may be a factor. The act of lifting the lid also requires individuals to put some thought as to whether they are using the appropriate bin.

The placement of collection bins at the site will be referred to in this guide as “re-sortation stations”. The number and location of re-sortation stations should reflect the size of the event and types of materials to be collected. Additional bins can be setup in a storage area where vendors can drop off packing material such as cardboard and soft plastics.

If possible, the bins or signage for the bins should be colour coded to differentiate the various collection streams. A recommended colour schematic is:

- **Green:** Compost – Organic Materials
- **Orange:** Refund – Beverage Containers
- **Blue:** Hard Plastics, Metal and Glass
- **Yellow:** Paper
- **Brown:** Cardboard
- **Black:** Landfill – Waste



## Re-sortation stations

- Create a site plan so that recycling and composting bins are easy to find and strategically placed. Suggested locations include:
  - Near vendors
  - Inside and outside eating areas
  - In public gathering areas (e.g. stage, sports field)
  - In and next to food preparation areas
  - Near bathrooms
  - At event entrances and exits
- Recycling and compost bins should be placed adjacent to all landfill waste bins
- Existing site waste bins, if not incorporated into a re-sortation station, should be made inaccessible by being removed, locked or covered during the event
- Contract with a waste management company that accepts compost and recyclables materials; some providers offer bins and pick-up service as well
- Washing station may be setup for participants to rinse food residue from recyclable items and wash hands

## Volunteers

- Secure volunteers to educate participants on how to use re-sortation stations and to check for cross-contamination of bins throughout the event
- Acquire volunteers from local schools, community or non-profit groups who can take on the responsibility of organizing and monitoring the re-sortation stations at events
- Provide training to re-sortation station volunteers well in advance of the event
- For safety reasons, provide volunteers with the following equipment: gloves, trash picker and hand sanitizer
- Post volunteer schedule in an accessible location so that everyone knows who is working and when shifts begin and end

## Signage and Awareness

- Post clear and informative signage on the bins that includes a description and images or samples of materials to indicate what materials go into what bin
- Quick tips about compost and recycling may be posted near the bins
- Setup a display that teaches participants how organic waste is composted or how recyclable materials are converted into new goods
- If reusable serving ware is used, post signage asking participants to reuse their dishes

## Other

- Become educated to what materials are accepted for composting and recycling and avoid the use of items which can't be reused, composted or recycled
- Use a bike trailer or golf cart for large events to transport multiple bins in a short time
- Donate refundable beverage containers to a designated non-profit organization (ask them to pick-up)
- Consider donating leftover food and beverages to a local food bank
- Ensure area is cleared of litter during the event and after the event



## Communication

Finally, you have made a plan for greening your event and gathered a team of support staff, vendors and volunteers to assist you. Don't forget to communicate these efforts! Communicating your green practices is important to getting buy-in from everyone involved with the event – show them you are serious about making the event green.

- Advertise yourself as a “Green Event”
- Draft a green event policy for your event and communicate it to all participants
- Communicate your commitment and reasons for the green practices to all stakeholders
- Ensure support staff, volunteers and suppliers adopt green practices (see appendix for resources)
- Ask participants for their assistance and cooperation in greening the event (e.g. take public transit, bring refillable water bottle and sorting compost and recyclables)
- Include information on your green initiatives on all promotional materials including your website and social media channels
- Communicate your successes after the event (e.g. how many people arrived by bike or the amount of waste generated at the event and diverted from the landfill each year)

The resources developed to supplement this guide include templates to assist you with communicating your event's green goals and successes. To view and download resources to assist you with planning your green event, please visit: [www.esquimalt.ca/greenevents](http://www.esquimalt.ca/greenevents).



*Signage promoting the Centennial Community Celebration as a “green event”*