

## CREATING CIRCULAR ECONOMY ROADMAPS FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Canadian municipalities and regions are ambitious in their efforts to take climate action and build stronger, more resilient local communities. Developing circular economies is an effective way to work toward both of these goals, and local governments are starting to better understand how circularity can help them deepen and accelerate progress on existing commitments related to climate change, the environment and the economy.

That's where the Circular Cities & Regions Initiative (CCRI) comes in. Created and developed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund, the National Zero Waste Council/ Metro Vancouver, the Recycling Council of Alberta and RECYC-QUÉBEC, CCRI aims to advance circular economy knowledge-sharing and capacity-building in Canadian communities and regions of all sizes.

Through the CCRI's Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Network, municipalities have been collaborating with each other and with the CCRI team and advisers to learn, brainstorm, network and take action. Participants attend facilitated workshops, receive one-on-one support and receive a Circular Opportunities Report to help them identify next steps in their circular economy journey. Many communities—like Squamish and Richmond, as described below—have chosen to use their experience in the P2P Network to inform the creation of their own circular economy roadmaps: the strategic frameworks they will use to help move their communities toward a more circular future.

A COLLABORATION OF



## COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: RICHMOND, B.C.

When Marcos Alejandro Badra joined the City of Richmond in 2018, the municipality had long been a national leader in the zero-waste movement. But the idea of the circular economy hadn't yet taken hold. Badra took the lead on promoting the concept and, with council's encouragement, he and his colleagues began by integrating circular economy criteria into procurement processes while simultaneously launching a pilot project testing [the use of recycled asphalt](#) in road construction.

So when Richmond's mayor learned about the creation of the CCRI, joining the first cohort of participants seemed like the logical next step. Badra and his colleagues applied with unanimous support from council. "Our council had integrated circular economy goals into their goals," he says. "They supported this as a natural evolution of our work."

Even in 2018, one of Richmond's five practical principles for a circular economy had been "collaborate to co-create," Badra says. "We believe that's a really strong value that we need to promote." They felt that joining CCRI's 2021–22 cohort would be a means for them to build newer and stronger relationships with municipalities in Canada and around the world, so that they could learn how other jurisdictions were developing circular economy practices and integrate those learnings into their own plans. "That was a huge opportunity for us," Badra says.

Like other participants, they began by working on a roadmap, but council soon pushed them to shift to creating a full strategy. Through CCRI workshops, cross-departmental collaboration, community consultation and a lot of conversations and education, Badra was able to finalize [the city's circular economy strategy](#), which was formally presented to council in April 2023—and approved unanimously. It took two years, but it was time well spent. "To do something that is really good, you need to spend time in consultation, in meetings and in training," he says. "You can't do it in a day."

## WHAT IS A CIRCULAR ECONOMY ROADMAP?

Wanting to make the local economy more circular is the first step. But what really takes things from ideas to results is a plan—a circular economy roadmap or strategy—with resources in place for implementation. While circular policies and procedures can be integrated into existing municipal frameworks on a case-by-case basis, having a circular economy roadmap helps communities better define objectives and actions and tailor them to local needs.

Just as important as the roadmap itself is the process involved in creating it. Cross-departmental collaboration is key to getting everyone on board and collecting a wide range of relevant and useful ideas. Community involvement matters too: not just asking for feedback, but educating residents and businesses about the municipality's circular economy goals and the reasoning behind them. Involving all interested parties in building a community's circular economy roadmap means crafting a plan that is likely to succeed.

“Familiarizing residents and businesses with the terminology is essential. Otherwise, it can feel really abstract.”

—Laura Wittenzellner,  
*District of Squamish*

## COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: SQUAMISH, B.C.

The District of Squamish is renowned for its breathtaking scenery and outdoorsy, nature-loving community: it's not for nothing that its tagline is *Hardwired for Adventure*. So it's no surprise that before it joined the 2022–23 CCRI cohort, Squamish already had circularity in mind; in fact, its [Community Climate Action Plan](#) stated that the economic development department was to start facilitating circular economy practices together with the local business community. "Circular economy was identified as a path forward in part because it aligns so well with community values," says Jen Stone, the District's economic development officer.

At the time Stone and her colleagues joined the cohort, they had a draft roadmap already in place; they had identified thematic areas and created a framework to help them structure their work and decision-making. Participating in webinars, workshops and other CCRI activities—as well as gathering input from facilitators and peers—helped them expand and revise that draft into a [roadmap](#), including a five-year implementation plan, that was endorsed by Council in October 2023.

Because the three thematic areas in Squamish's roadmap—textiles, food systems and built environment—align with those of many other communities, they were able to integrate others' learnings into their plans, needing only to localize them to their own requirements. "We did research within each of the thematic areas to make sure we were taking action that was really relevant to our community," Stone says.

When asked what advice she has for other communities working toward their own circular economy roadmap, Stone encourages them not to lose sight of the forest for the trees—or vice versa. In Squamish, for example, the sustainability team focuses on implementing strategies and programs and executing tactics, building on their ongoing zero-waste work, while the economic development team develops strategy: partnerships, innovation and ecosystem work. Both are important. "Don't skip the tactical work because you've got these other aspirational goals that will take longer to achieve," she says. "They need to be done in tandem."

## CCRI SUCCESSES

Since its launch in 2021, the CCRI has helped facilitate 25 community roadmaps and strategic opportunity reports for communities across Canada.

“ We've learned that it's possible to achieve better results with the same budget.”

—Marcos Alejandro Badra,  
*City of Richmond*

## WHY COLLABORATION MATTERS

If you ask Stone why municipalities should join the CCRI, she'll quickly point out that while the programming is extremely useful, it's the opportunities for collaboration that really stand out and are worth taking advantage of. In fact, she recommends that participants set aside dedicated time for networking to get the full value of the program. "Learning from others is a big piece of success with regard to the circular economy," she says. "Otherwise, we're all just reinventing the wheel."

Badra concurs, and adds that internal networking—setting aside ample opportunities to engage with municipal colleagues and other stakeholders on planning circular economy initiatives—is just as important. "This affects people's lives," he says, adding that without spending enough time educating, consulting and collaborating, you're setting yourself up to fail—because if people don't understand what you're doing, they're not only less likely to adopt circular economy plans, but also prone to putting up obstacles. Ultimately, he notes, your circular economy roadmap will be better thanks to this in-depth collaboration. "No one is an expert in everything. And that is the reason you need to connect and ask questions."

## JOIN THE CIRCULARITY MOVEMENT

Creating a circular economy roadmap is only one step in an organization's circular economy journey—but it's an important one. As Richmond and Squamish have shown, the process of building a circular strategy helps municipalities define their goals and bring staff, elected officials and community members on board with the circular economy vision and its potential benefits.

Building a circular strategy is also an important way to highlight the circular practices municipalities have already been excelling at for decades, like organic waste management and recycling. While the idea

of a circular economy might be new, it encompasses many existing concepts and behaviours. Reframing these within a circular economy roadmap and adding new practices such as circular procurement can help communities uncover opportunities to become more sustainable while strengthening local economies.

By participating in CCRI activities and accessing CCRI resources, municipalities can strengthen their understanding of how circular economies work and gain momentum on their own path toward circularity. Ready to learn more? Find out how to participate at [canadiancircularcities.ca](https://canadiancircularcities.ca).

