

**DID THE TOWN OF LADYSMITH'S COMMUNITY  
VISIONING PROCESS INCREASE BROADER MUNICIPAL  
ENGAGEMENT?**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project on civic engagement in the Town of Ladysmith explores the potential that a short-term municipal visioning process influenced broader civic engagement outside of its scope. Using mixed methods to triangulate quantitative, qualitative, and participatory data, this research incorporates existing literature and investigates new ways of measuring civic engagement. The results demonstrate the importance of trust, transparency, clear two-way communication, and shared responsibility in creating effective community engagement. This research also demonstrates a preliminary indication that unplanned civic engagement increases may be a result of finite engagement events when those events meet the above criteria for collaboration between citizens and their local government.

**Keywords:** civic engagement; municipal; local government; participation; community visioning

## **DEDICATION**

To my boss, mentor, and ally during my time in Ladysmith, who played a significant role inspiring this research and fuelling my belief in increasing community well-being through citizen involvement. This project is dedicated to Ruth Malli, with deep appreciation for her insight, determination, and limitless spirit.

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## GLOSSARY

Civic engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern</li><li>2. of or relating to a citizen, a city, citizenship, or community affairs</li><li>3. working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference (Ehrlich 2000)</li></ol>
Broader civic engagement	For the purposes of this research paper, broader civic engagement describes any engagement with the Town of Ladysmith, or with the community of Ladysmith, occurring after the completion of the Visioning process and in excess of civic engagement existing before the Visioning sessions
Bricolage	The shared construction of ideas and solutions, built by multiple players, including collective fact-finding, changing opinions and layering knowledge to create a more representative result (Innes et al.1999)

# **1: INTRODUCTION**

In an age of economic, environmental, and ethical challenges, municipalities hold a significant amount of influence on their citizens' quality of life. In British Columbia, many aspects of urban design, development policy, and economic development, are within the hands of local government. Civic engagement helps facilitate inclusive, responsive action that reflects the choices of the population. Currently, a number of British Columbian municipalities are looking at ways to engage their constituents. This study examines the potential for one type of scheduled engagement to increase broader lasting civic engagement in a variety of existing forums.

This paper will set the context for Ladysmith's Community Visioning Process, define the research question, discuss relevant literature, and introduce the significance of the study. This will be followed by a description of the methodology, data collection and analysis. It will conclude with study findings and policy implications to translate the research into a broader setting.

## **1.1 Background**

The Town of Ladysmith was incorporated in 1904 and has historically been a resource-rich settlement, first with coal, and then with forestry. In 2006, the population was 7,538, and it increased to 8,144 in 2008, an average increase of four percent annually, significantly higher the national average for rural areas

of 0.2% annual increase in the previous intercensal period (Statistics Canada 2009). Although there has been a quickly increasing population and considerable development pressure for residential expansion and densification, there has not been a parallel increase in jobs, businesses, and other services to support those people. With Ladysmith becoming increasingly more of a bedroom community catering to an older population, concerns were raised about the social, environmental and economic sustainability of the Town. The recently built nearby airport and beautiful natural setting are popular selling features for real estate in Ladysmith, but they seldom bring permanent local jobs and tend to attract a certain wealthier, older demographic, replacing the working-class, family-oriented historical identity of Ladysmith. Because of Ladysmith's accessibility and landscape, it is in a different situation than many smaller, resource-based towns in British Columbia. It should be noted that their economic concerns are mild in comparison with many struggling interior and Northern communities, and that the impetus for and impacts of Visioning may be quite different if translated into those other communities.

With pressure coming from a variety of perspectives, there was the potential that imminent Council decisions would fundamentally change the face of the town. In response to this, Council decided to consult with the Town residents to define their desired future in a more representative way.

Increasing residential units and approving significant development are both means of income for the Town, although they can both come with impacts on the character and form of the community.

Challenging economic times face Ladysmith currently with the downturn in the forestry industry, after decades of relying on the successive exploitation of resources, driven by external sources of capital (Markey 2005). The closing of many mills in the area has caused increasing unemployment and underemployment. Faced with these economic challenges and opportunities, along with the global challenge of climate change, the perspective taken by the local government has a significant impact on the way a community develops. On one hand, the Council could allow the market to define Ladysmith's future by encouraging any investment and development in the town. On the other hand, it could take initiative in shaping the town in a more conscious manner with forms of community engagement.

The Town of Ladysmith takes a lot of its identity from its form and character. The Town of Ladysmith is known by its residents as a “quaint, familiar place where people are friendly and say hello on the street.”(Dashwood 2009) The small-town feel of the area is important to its residents, as is keeping business local and small-scale instead of big-box.

In 2008, with rising public resistance to the sprawling nature of development, and increasing hardships for small businesses, Town Council decided to consult the public to find out what they wanted for their future, asking them how they wanted Ladysmith to look as the town grew. This is how the Community Visioning series was born. The techniques used involved appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider 2008) and the principles of CED such as the direct and meaningful participation of the local community and the collection of a

diversity of interests and sectors to develop the competency of community members to deal with local problems and opportunities (Markey 2005).

From August to October 2008, the Town of Ladysmith conducted a series of six Community Visioning sessions to address residents' desires for the future of the town's design and character. All new development proposals were put on hold during this time so that taking the pulse of the community could be the priority. Three of the sessions were held in the evening for three hours, and three of the sessions were eight hours long, on Saturdays. The sessions were organized in a sequence to introduce the idea of Visioning on a town-wide scale, to include environmental sustainability, and to cover three specific development areas of town, and lastly, to confirm that the feedback received was in fact heard and accurately represented in the final report.

Guided by the consulting group HB Lanarc, participants learned best practices from other small towns that have faced similar challenges; they answered a variety of questions designed to spark the imagination; they collaborated with others to complete a variety of exercises designed to elicit the community vision; and they defined an experiential, visual and natural language to reflect the community's values. The objective was to document and explore citizens' ideas and dreams for Ladysmith's future development after informing them of possibilities and giving them a general overview of the systemic implications of these decisions.

There were six sessions with the following themes, in sequence: Overall Town, Environmental Sustainability, Downtown Area, Holland Creek Area



(residential), Waterfront Area, and Confirm the Vision. The public report from Visioning findings was released in February 2009 and is meant to inform policy documents and decisions.

The Visioning sessions were broadly publicized through print, internet, word of mouth, posters in public places, and road signs. Notices were sent out as invitations so that people would feel welcome and personally accountable.

As an active observer at the Visioning Sessions as well as a staff liaison for the project between the Town and the public, my observations indicated that participants were gaining knowledge in these sessions and this may have inspired them to become more involved with local government in a context outside the scope of the Visioning process. For example, some residents decided they would run for office in the municipal election that followed the Visioning sessions and they noted the influence of the Visioning sessions in their decision. Others contacted the Town, noting the Visioning session had prompted them to think about other ways to get involved in local government, such as applying for a Commission. Their requests for further information on application deadlines and details were acts of increased civic engagement due to the Visioning process. This research project aims to explore further the impacts of the Visioning series on *broader civic engagement* in the Town of Ladysmith. It focuses on municipal engagement specifically, including interaction with the local government, as well as interaction with the local community, such as volunteering for organizations within the town and engaging with the local town newspaper. It does not focus on provincial or federal civic engagement.

The Ladysmith Visioning Process was widely publicized, entirely open to the public, and drew out approximately 100 people per session for a total of six events. This attendance is significantly higher than any regular Council meeting or public hearing, thus exposing a higher number and variety of residents to local government's role in their lives. Although the Visioning series attracted many more participants than any other Council meeting or public hearing, 'increasing attendance and including a more comprehensive cross-section of the population' was noted as the top area for improvement in interviews with staff and elected officials.

## **1.2 Research Question and Theoretical Framework**

*Did the Town of Ladysmith's Community Visioning Process Increase Broader Civic Engagement?*

Supporting question:

*What evidence exists that broader civic engagement can be an unplanned and longer lasting effect of a short-term civic visioning process?*

### **1.2.1 Community Visioning's Connection to Civic Engagement**

Having been involved in the Community Visioning process, it seemed possible that there would be a connection between its finite series of community

engagement sessions and a broader effect on civic engagement. The Visioning process was an opportunity to introduce a wider variety of people to the workings of local government and the connections between governance, quality of life, and changes in their community. I believe this may have acted as an impetus for a greater number of people to become involved in civic activities after being exposed to the Visioning process. My research project examines if there is truth behind that assertion through the analysis of participatory observations, interviews with key elected officials and staff, and quantitative civic engagement indicators.

The importance of this topic has been studied in other research that shows the public has a stake in more engagement in municipal governance. (Mandell 2008; Agranoff and Rinkle 1986; Brinkerhoff 2002; Goodwin 2004; Huxham 2005) With this in mind, an analysis of personal, qualitative, and quantitative measures will help to illuminate the effects of the Visioning process on *broader civic engagement* and its benefits to the community.

## **1.3 Literature Review**

### **1.3.1 Defining and Relating Civic Engagement**

“ ‘Civic engagement’ refers to individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. It means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference.”(Ehrlich 2000)

The term “civic” originates from Latin for city and citizenship and has a certain

emphasis on the moral aspect of involvement in terms of caring about their community as a whole instead of individual well-being and being willing to sacrifice self-interest in the name of the wider sphere (Galston 2005). Civic engagement is an important aspect of community cohesion, and an active democratic society (Levinson 2005).

### **1.3.2 Defining the Role of the Municipality**

To begin, it is important to note the role of the local government in relation to the engagement of its citizens. Municipalities' mandates as delineated in BC's Community Charter state:

*"(1.1) Municipalities and their councils are recognized as an order of government within their jurisdiction that.....determine the public interest of their communities, within a legislative framework that supports balance and certainty in relation to the differing interests of their communities... provide effective management and delivery of services in a manner that is responsive to community needs."(Government of British Columbia 2003)*

In order to determine the public interest and respond to varied and evolving needs, ongoing public engagement is valuable to a local government. The literature included below helps illuminate different levels of community engagement and their impacts on municipal process.

The public demands more transparent and accessible municipal processes than was the case in the past (Lukensmeyer and Torres 2008).

*"Public deliberation by citizens has a long history (from ancient Greek agora through Parisian salons to the global ether of Internet chatrooms). Yet it is only in the last decade or so that groups outside of government have become essential partners in governance activities, contributing resources, knowledge and capacities to policymaking and practice that go far beyond traditional activities of voting, attending public meetings, and lobbying."*  
(Hillier, 2005, 151)

Non-governmental organizations, community groups, and other associations' and individuals' involvement in the governance of communities has also led to the increased demand for inclusive and open deliberations and accountability.

“Civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes profoundly influence civic and political behaviour. Civic and political engagement, concomitantly, are central to the strength, stability, and legitimacy of democracy” (Levinson 2005, 7).

Knowledge transfer is an integral part of the hypothesis that citizens would be more involved after the Visioning sessions. Greater civic knowledge promotes greater civic participation, greater acceptance of others, and greater knowledge and consistency of one's political views (Galston 2005) so that in more official situations, they are more articulate and clear on what they want.

Longitudinal research involving stakeholder-based consensus building in multiple case studies has shown that story telling, role-playing, and group intellectual *bricolage* are more engaging forms of discussion and collective reasoning than tradeoffs and logical argumentation, according to documentation and participant interviews. This strategy allows stakeholders to consider solutions that are not normally acceptable to their organization or base of support (Innes and Booher 1999). The recommended techniques discourage the taking of positions, which polarize, and instead focus on interests, that are more likely to overlap (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991). This is important in welcoming new participants who may not have a solid position or feel confident enough to assert it openly.

This change in approach from a polarized method to a sharing method has the potential to attract new people to learn about local government decision-making and jurisdiction. Once they are exposed to the structure of it, and equipped with new knowledge on the issues from talking with others and asking questions, they may have found new confidence to continue to be involved with those issues or others, through conventional avenues, such as attending regular Council meetings.

Patterson describes the general state of public involvement as disengaged: “Ordinary citizens have been buffeted by developments they do not control and only vaguely comprehend, and which have diminished their stake, interest, and confidence in elections” (Patterson 2002, 22). To remedy this, there is an argument that raising awareness of developments and involving the public in decision-making would increase their stake, interest and confidence in civic affairs generally. Civic or citizen engagement and participatory processes, if adequately open, inclusive, fair, and rational, theoretically produce a range of positive democratic outcomes, including increasingly more active citizens (Barber 1984).

In attempts to make the process open and fair, the use of a consulting group leading the sessions introduces a degree of removal from the regular relationships in a municipality. This has the potential to allow people to express opinions that may have been loaded or sensitive to ask a staff member or elected official directly.

Conversely, the addition of an outside consultant has the potential to bring other prejudices and filters into the process. Without specific knowledge about the town and its citizens, a consultant can reduce the level of comfort of citizens, and bring an inappropriate lens through which to take input and reflect it in a report.

The value of engaging members of the public is that they are generally looking out for their long-term interest in the community. If decisions will affect the lives of their children and grandchildren, they will look beyond the next election cycle in terms of policy decisions. Their local knowledge and expertise can contribute to better decisions focused on a longer period (Bush, Gillson, and Hamilton 2005). With a greater participation rate, more voices are heard, and a greater range of factors can be included in the decision-making. To complement the voices of the population, experts can be used to educate the public on available and preferable options using more in-depth knowledge, including best practises and successes in similar situations elsewhere.

### **1.3.3 Measuring Engagement**

If the level of public engagement in a series of Visioning sessions is important in determining its impact on broader civic involvement, it is important to define those levels and situate Visioning therein.

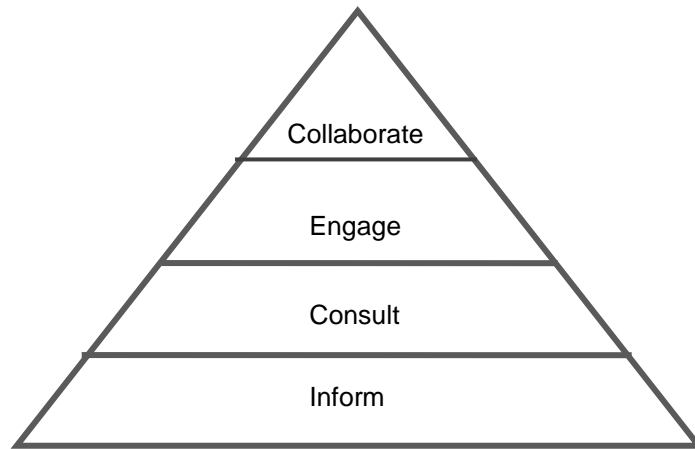
A ladder of engagement is commonly used to differentiate levels of public participation. Ladders generally show manipulation at the low end of participation, with empowerment at the high end, where participants feel the most satisfied with their level of involvement. (Bush et al. 2005, Arnstein 1969)

In Figure 1, Lukensmeyer and Torres express a similar hierarchy of engagement, with information at the low end, and collaboration at the high end. The Inform level is one-way communication from those in power to those who are not. The Consult level asks the public's opinions but the final decision is the City's. In the Engagement level, participants may be part of the solution, and contribute more free-thinking and independent responses. In Collaboration, there is clear two way communication and accountability where all parties have responsibility and power.

The Ladysmith Community Visioning process fits best into the Engage level, with some aspects of Collaboration. In the end, decisions still rest with City Council, so the collaboration does not permeate the exercise and its outcomes, but there is a high level of responsibility and accountability that come from the published report that cannot be ignored.



**Figure 1 - Ladder of Participation**



(Adapted from Lukensmeyer and Torres 2008)

Storytelling, role playing, and group idea construction (Innes and Booher 1999) are modes of consulting and collaborating, which are mid-level to high-levels of engagement (see Fig.1) (Lukensmeyer and Torres 2008). Successful engagement projects, as described by participants, include writing a plan and implementing it; learning; interest representation; relationship building; creating responsibility; and gaining social and political acceptability (McCool 2001). Of these attributes, Visioning produced a high-level values-based plan, it taught new aspects of sustainability and potential for the face of growth, it gave voice to the different interests in the room, it built new relationships between citizens themselves and Town officials and staff, and it created a feeling of responsibility and accountability with the final report. It lacked the implementation portion of a successful project, but there has been limited time to complete this.

Overall, Visioning falls into a high quality level of engagement when using existing hierarchies of civic participation. No one model of participation levels has

been isolated for use in this analysis because no one model represents all the areas of value that Visioning created. The long-term dimensions of holding Visioning over several months, the aspect of learning and connection to existing forums, and the focus on core values instead of fixed outcomes are not thoroughly explained by existing ladders. The inclusion of a sampling of ladders is to identify that high quality engagement was an integral part of the spin off engagement benefits, but that there is no need to narrowly define levels specific to one model or another.

#### **1.3.4 Potential Drawbacks of Civic Engagement**

Civic engagement comes with potential benefits and costs to the processes of local government. Potential drawbacks include slower decision-making processes, financial cost, increased work for staff and elected officials, increased pressure from citizens to respond to results, and invalid, unrepresentative or coerced public input.

There are reasons to be cautious about promoting public engagement due to the potential for co-optation by those in power as well as by influential community members. Gramsci uses the term passive revolution to describe a style of politics that involves public engagement, making it a form of consent that is created from above to gain the passive consent of the population (in Abells 2006). Through a Gramscian lens, public consultation in advanced capitalist democracies renegotiates relations between state, capital and civil society in

order to allow change without challenging the political order or threatening the existing hierarchy of power. As a result, public consultation is used to defuse and de-politicize important issues of public policy (ibid.).

*“The price of obtaining proactive influence on processes of public governance is cooptation as one loses the joyful right to criticize and protest against unsatisfactory policy outcomes. Not only the public authorities but also the involved citizens and stakeholder organizations are bound by the negotiated agreements and must recognize their ownership to good as well as bad outcomes...” (Agger, Sorenson, Torfing 2008,33)*

A general area of concern is whether this emphasis on civic engagement is less a new way of involving the public or more a way for government to get its original objectives more widely accepted by the public (Mandell 2008).

Public participation events can be co-opted by members of the public themselves.

*“Deliberative processes [systems of political decision-making that rely on ongoing citizen deliberation] can be manipulated by people with ulterior motives, they can marginalize the inarticulate (who will also be those most vulnerable to domination) and they can result in stonewalling by the powerful in the face of needed change” (Shapiro 2003, 148).*

Participants themselves can work alone or in groups to create the appearance of a critical mass of people either for or against an action. This can be achieved through dominating the speaker's floor, bringing more supporters than the opposition, providing more high-tech, high-skill, and high cost materials or resources to portray their perspective. These tactics can serve to undermine the equally valid argument of opponents who may be socio-economically unable to match those techniques that may better capture the decision-makers' attention and confidence.

It is very difficult to assess potential coercion when its nature is subversive and participants would be largely unaware that they had been guided to come to decisions that were preordained by those in power. Asking participants if they felt they were coerced may be a futile exercise because successful coercion would have convinced the public that they support what those in power support, so the public would either believe their voices were heeded, or they would continue to be too intimidated to admit to coercion.

An exploratory format in public consultation is another important factor in the legitimacy of its findings. In asking people to describe their objectives with an open-ended question, there is less opportunity for those in power to influence their answers.

*“As a formation of opinion and will, public discourse is not merely a cognitive exercise but mobilizes reasons and arguments that draw on citizens’ actual source of motivation and volition. It thereby generates a ‘communicative power’ that has real impact on the formal decision making and action that represents the final institutional expression of political ‘will.’”*  
(Habermas 1996)

Literature has documented that when examining the important factors in citizen engagement, “Results indicated that participants provided answers reflecting several dimensions: writing a plan and implementing it; learning; interest representation; relationship building; creating responsibility; and gaining social and political acceptability. “(McCool 2001) Legitimate engagement also permits negative feedback to occur, which is an important aspect of genuine public participation (Dryzek 1987; McCool 2001).

It is important to acknowledge the drawbacks of civic engagement, including the anxiety felt from the community afterward, when some voices

appear not to have been heeded. The many layers of the local government system can make it difficult to meet citizen expectations in terms of timeliness, reach, and completeness of initiatives or policies. This may result in citizens feeling engagement exercises are to no avail, and that local government remains disconnected from their everyday lives.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

There are few guiding precedents for a quantitative, social science-based analysis of civic engagement descriptors (Reed 2000). This examination of civic engagement will contribute to research in this area, including civic engagement that may not be explicit but more personal, such as citizens informing themselves of local civic events and initiatives. This has been done to include the citizens that are actively informing themselves but are nonetheless apathetic due to either satisfaction with the existing decisions or to dissatisfaction with existing decisions. Awareness of civic activity is a valuable part of civic engagement and allows questions to be answered, confusion to be clarified, and deliberation of important issues to take place, whether or not they are acted upon in a more vocal way.

If high levels of public engagement (Bush, Gillson, and Hamilton 2005; Lukensmeyer and Torres 2008) have a positive effect on citizens' relationship with their municipality, this evidence could be justification for other jurisdictions to invest in similar initiatives to create a more functional, inclusive, and interactive relationship with the people they serve. Increasing levels of engagement may

provoke both additional positive and negative feedback and input. All of these views are valuable to making the system more democratic, representative, and interactive. Although vocally dissatisfied citizens may appear to slow down civic processes, their viewpoints are integral to an inclusive procedure. British Columbian municipalities' purpose is to serve the differing interests of their communities (Government of British Columbia 2003). In order to do this well, they must first be aware of the differing interests, including those that support and do not support their current actions. Effective civic engagement strategies should draw out the naysayers, the previously apathetic supporters, and the spectrum of opinions in between.

Why is civic engagement important?

*"A strong civic life and a flourishing democracy presume the active involvement of many people across society. Civic engagement is thus both a barometer of our public life and a focal point for action when we want to improve it... Civic engagement implies meaningful connections among citizens, issues, institutions, and the political system. It implies voice and agency, a feeling of power and effectiveness, with real opportunities to have a say. It implies active participation, with real opportunities to make a difference. (McCoy and Scully 2002, 117)*

Community vitality is fostered by strong, active and inclusive relationships between residents, private sector, public sector and civil society organizations. These characteristics allow communities to thrive and adapt in changing contexts while improving the wellbeing of citizens. Civic participation incorporates public voice into governmental decision-making (Scott 2007) which has the potential to meet more people's needs because their needs have been better identified.

Increased civic engagement allows citizens more opportunity to influence the systems that govern their lives. Participating in civic activities such as attending City Council meetings, writing letters to the Mayor, and becoming engaged in the activities of the municipality through the media grants citizens the chance to influence policy and increase municipal government accountability. Public documentation of issues relevant to citizens facilitates accountability because it allows anyone to reference the statements from the past and compare them to the actions of the present and proposed future. Interface between the public and elected officials is likely to produce better governance outcomes, where the officials are more aware of the public's needs, and the public is more able to express their needs and assess the responsiveness of their local government.

A diverse range of people will provide more knowledge and experience necessary to solve complex and changing problems than a single person or body alone (Kooiman 1993). Every citizen has a different set of experiences and life circumstances that frames the way they see and participate in their community. Holding public gatherings that facilitate the participation of more people increases the number of perspectives heard and can introduce new ideas that otherwise may not have been clear.

*" We know that the more minds that are brought to bear on the sorts of difficult decisions we have to make, the greater the chances of us making wise decisions based on considering the issues from a range of perspectives. This is vital to achieve sustainable development."(Bush, Gillson, and Hamilton 2005, 182)*

Public involvement has an important role to play in guiding action away from undesirable outcomes. It permits negative or corrective feedback to occur in the local government bureaucracy. Negative feedback in the systems context provides the important function of ensuring that systems do not spin out of control (Dryzek 1987). In decision-making, negative feedback demonstrates the social and political acceptability of proposed actions. This provokes a variety of perspectives that may help officials form adaptive strategies to accommodate more of their citizens (McCool and Guthrie 2001).

Giving people the information they need, the opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them and their quality of life, and increasing access to justice, are all valid reasons to seek the highest level of civic engagement possible.

Citizens as agents in their political arena can be thought of as the engine of community vitality. Vital communities (Born 2008) are those that have the capacity to act, and develop and manage resources together, in pursuit of wellbeing (Bush, Gillson, and Hamilton 2005). Increased civic engagement, including both positive and negative input, will build a stronger base for community ownership of decision-making and ultimately, may contribute to improvements in community and individual quality of life.

*“Effective policymaking open to robust citizen participation is the hallmark of good governance in the twenty-first century....today, democratic governments are being asked to square their accounts of freedom and fairness against measures of transparency, accountability, and participation” (Lukensmeyer and Torres 2008, 209).*



In contemporary times, the Canadian public expects not only to be informed, but also to have the opportunity to articulate their position and have the potential to affect outcomes. The forms of governance that do so will likely move forward more quickly with action and face fewer barriers from public opponents. Higher levels of reciprocal information exchange from the start of a process allow people to understand more aspects of any initiative, which has the potential to increase their understanding and tolerance before going to the decision-making phase where people may feel threatened and react by opposing the proposal because they do not fully understand it.

The relevance of examining changes in civic engagement range from enhancing the current pool of research on the subject to increasing democracy, agency and power sharing, to facilitating higher accountability and opportunity for assessment, to a more vital, responsive, understanding community with a focus on longer-term well-being.

Governments and local governments in particular, are facing increasing pressure to involve the public in decision-making and deliberation. Municipal and regional governments make the decisions that link most closely with citizen's everyday lives. The governing legislation and proximity of local government activities makes it the most accessible form of government in Canada.

*"While all sectors are confronted with the need to explore and experiment with inter-organizational relationships, the government, or public sector, is particularly challenged by decreasing budgets, growing demand for more citizen involvement and the realization that they no longer hold all expertise and knowledge (if indeed they ever did).... Relations with community members and voluntary-sector organizations have shifted from the periphery to the centre of government policy and practise" (Mandell 2008, 65).*

With citizens demanding more involvement in the decisions that affect their lives, and governments acknowledging the value of stakeholder knowledge and participation, many municipalities are embarking on enhanced public engagement initiatives (City of Halifax 2006; City of Vancouver 2003; District of Sechelt 2008; City of Lethbridge 2005). One form that this has taken is a “visioning” exercise, which involves communities working with City staff to create their visions for the future, based on community needs and aspirations. The process generally involves contacting residents, sharing ideas through interactive displays and group discussions, choosing directions through workshops and surveys, and finalizing the Vision to be presented to Council. Approved Visions can be implemented via initiatives that can include capital expenditures, more detailed planning, rezonings, and redirecting existing programs to make the Vision a reality.

It is valuable to know if these types of Visioning sessions may produce broader engagement results as a by-product, thus making the sessions more valuable than a one-time event in terms of creating *broader civic engagement* inside of existing forums (Council meetings, correspondence, media, volunteering). This could be cause for municipalities to invest time and funding in Visioning Processes because of their broader community benefits.

Examining Ladysmith’s Visioning process will provide insight that may transfer to other collaborative engagement sessions in other communities across British Columbia. This research may help identify the potential for *broader civic engagement* in those cases, or spur further research in those places.

## 2: METHODOLOGY

Ideally, in order to assess change as a result of the citizen participation exercise considered here, entry and exit surveys would have been implemented before and after the Visioning sessions. As this did not occur, three main types of data will be used to evaluate changes in *broader civic engagement* in retrospect: participatory observations, quantitative indicators, and qualitative elite interviews. The on-going comparison of data from mixed methods provided a base of support for fact checking, consistency, and pattern identification.

For the purposes of this study, engagement is measured not just by the level of protest or support voiced, but also by the number of people informing themselves actively about civic issues and the quality of that engagement. This includes those citizens who make themselves aware, and are either satisfied and apathetic towards current civic activities, or are dissatisfied and too disenchanted with local government to express their thoughts. Civic engagement in this study refers to actively engaging with the ideas, initiatives, and policies of the local government, but is not limited to engaging with elected officials or staff. Engagement could occur through absorbing media, reading from the Town website, volunteering, and speaking with other citizens about civic issues.

## **2.1 Participatory Observations**

After participating in the Visioning process as a liaison between the people in the community and City Hall staff, I have a set of observations that contribute to the qualitative interviews that were conducted. My role in the Visioning process included involvement in planning, public relations, and interacting with the public to increase participation and understanding of the events. My observed data includes face-to-face interactions, emails, and personal reactions to the Visioning process. For example, I learned more about the role of local government in my everyday life, in terms of their jurisdiction on design, zoning, and bylaws that can guide the form and character of a place, as well as shape the activities that happen there. This knowledge made me more interested in attending Council meetings, reading minutes, and becoming more involved in decision-making because it was more clear to me how I could impact decisions that would later affect me. There was the potential that others experienced similar changes in civic engagement beyond the Visioning series.

## **2.2 Quantitative Indicators**

### **2.2.1 Model of analysis**

Nine quantitative indicators were examined for their relative changes before and after the Visioning series. In all cases, an increase in the number of incidences suggests an increase in civic engagement. Table 1 lists the quantitative indicators investigated.

To utilize both well-documented quantitative indicators and more exploratory indicators, the nested model of analysis was used. The nested model of analysis uses well-accepted indicators on which to build more descriptive and exploratory indicators of the same topic. Here the base indicators are voter turnout and volunteer rates. They establish a context in which the more novel indicators can be understood and utilized.

**Figure 2 – Nested Model of Analysis**

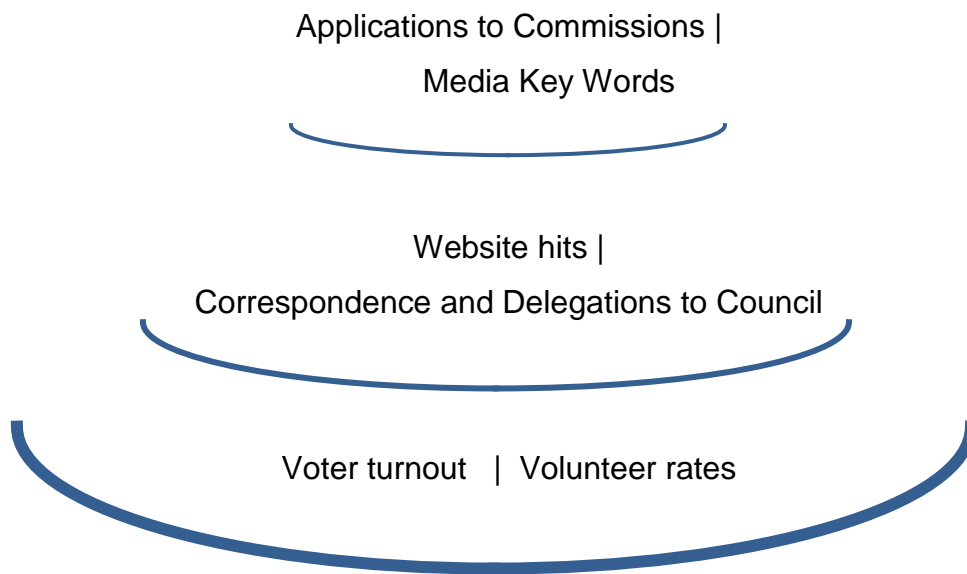


Table 1 – Quantitative Indicators

Indicator	Source	History of indicator
Applications to Commissions	Corporate Services Coordinator	Exploratory indicator
Media Key Words	Ladysmith Chronicle	Exploratory indicator
Letters to the Editor	Ladysmith Chronicle	Exploratory indicator
Website visits	<a href="http://www.ladysmith.ca/stats">www.ladysmith.ca/stats</a>	Exploratory indicator
Correspondence to Council	Agendas from Town of Ladysmith website	Exploratory indicator
Delegations to Council	Agendas from Town of Ladysmith website	Exploratory indicator
Candidates running for Council	Corporate Officer	Exploratory indicator
Voter turnout	Civic Info website	Accepted indicator
Volunteer rates	Ladysmith Resources Centre Association	Accepted indicator

The accepted quantitative indicators include municipal voter turnout and volunteer rates in the community. These indicators have been used in other measurements of civic engagement and community leadership, such as the Vital Signs reports that are completed across Canada and others (Reed 2000; Keeter 2002). The Guelph Community Foundation's report describes the importance of these indicators: "Participation in civic life contributes to our sense of connection 'to one another. By voting, volunteering.... we foster leadership that helps build and maintain a vibrant community.'" (2008)

The more exploratory indicators include visits to the municipal website, applications for committees and commissions, letters to the Mayor or Council, volunteer rates and media review key word searches. There are some examples of similar indicators being used in research: contacting a Councillor; contacting a newspaper; contributing to an online discussion; contributing to/creating a public message (e.g. on a website); and researching a political topic, are all actions used as indicators in Livingstone and Markham's work (Livingstone et al. 2008) but these indicators could be further explored and detailed.

The indicators used in this research project will not distinguish between positive and negative interactions. For the purposes of this project, the significance of increased public involvement is the benefit of community input, whether that supports or refutes the path the municipality is currently taking. Corrective and critical feedback is an important aspect of civic engagement. For this reason, content analysis of letters and articles will be minimal. The focus will be on changes in the value of each indicator.

The exploratory indicators are alternate ways of showing leadership and commitment to one's community. They gauge more continual opportunities to show civic involvement than voter turnout, representing alternative methods of more consistent interaction with the municipality. Indicators such as voting are considered benchmarks but only happen every three years; measures that look at intervening forms of civic engagement are no less important (Keown 2007). The indicators aim to measure civic activity with the idea that civic engagement increases public well-being. It is acknowledged that exogenous factors could

also be influencing the level of civic engagement. The qualitative and observed data are an important aspect of validating the indicators to show whether they played a role in changing civic behaviour or whether externalities may have been at play. The lacking in data quality and timeliness of measured indicators is another reason to supplement quantitative data with qualitative information.

### **2.2.2 Applications to Commissions**

The function of Commissions is to advise and assist City Council with respect to all matters pertaining to the area of focus of that commission. For example, the Environment Commission advises on environmental issues in the Town. Ladysmith Town Council annually appoints community members to participate on various town commissions: Parks, Recreation & Culture; Heritage Revitalization Advisory; Advisory Planning; Advisory Design; Environment, Liquid Waste Management and Economic Development. Commissions generally meet once a month for one to three hours at a time. Their role is to receive requests from Council to advise on issues of their expertise, and then to make recommendations to the Council. Some commissions are more advisory, and some are more action-oriented, creating strategic plans and being involved in initiatives. Vacancies are advertised in May of each year and are open to the public.

Measuring potential changes in the number of applications to commissions assists in clarifying if there was increased engagement by citizens who wanted to be involved in the workings of City Hall. The number of



applications to municipal Commissions were counted for the spring 2008 and 2009 seasons.

### **2.2.3 Candidates Running for Council**

The number of candidates running in the municipal election is an indicator of the interest from the public in being involved at a high level of civic responsibility. Data was collected from the Corporate Officer for the 2005 and 2008 elections. The Corporate Officer receives all official applications for Council before an election.

### **2.2.4 Media Keywords**

Media keywords are an exploration of perceived public interest in local governance, as the mandate of media is to report on subjects of the public's interest. It is important to acknowledge concerns about propaganda, media pre-conceptions, effects of ownership and advertising, and the influence of those in power (Herman 1988). Yet despite these arguments regarding the biases of the mass media, it is also asserted that no individual can obtain all the information to fulfil his or her civic responsibilities, and the press performs a necessary function in providing a more complete spectrum of information (Powell 1988). Ultimately, media key word searches were collected and analysed in this research as a preliminary indicator of broad civic engagement, not to be used in isolation, but to augment other indicators.

To collect the relevant key words from Ladysmith Chronicle newspaper articles before and after the Visioning Process, a ProQuest database was

referenced that electronically stores articles from August 2004 to the present. This mode allowed for keyword searches pertaining to civic engagement.

The selected keywords are Town, Mayor, council\*, engage\*, participat\*, consult\*, involve\*, civic\*, commission. In the case of media keyword occurrences, changes in the number of occurrences of these words before and after the start of the Visioning process were noted. After the database identified the articles and letters including all keywords, they were filtered manually to identify the number that pertained to municipal issues as opposed to regional, national, or other unrelated issues.

There are limitations to the scope of this method; as it is electronic, it may not include all of the articles of the hardcopy newspaper. Additionally, editorial subjectivity always plays a part in media content. Nonetheless, this source is still valuable because media tends to publish what readers are interested in, and increased interest in the keyword search terms is an indicator of increased engagement on civic issues. Keywords were separated into those found in articles and those found in letters to the editor.

#### **2.2.5 Website Visits**

The Town of Ladysmith hosts a website ([www.ladysmith.ca](http://www.ladysmith.ca)) where there are opportunities to learn about events and decision-making in the municipality. Residents can engage with Council meeting agendas and minutes, become informed of opportunities to address Council, read reports and strategic plans, and generally better understand what is happening in their local government. By

measuring changes in the number of website visits before and after the Community Visioning series, another piece of the engagement puzzle will be filled – increased website visits is one factor that points towards increased *broader civic engagement*.

The number of visits to the municipal website and pages requested off the website were counted for six months preceding Visioning (January to June 2008) and for six months following (January to June 2009). This data is publicly accessible off the Town website, under “statistics.”

Visits occur when a remote site makes a request for a page on the Town server for the first time. As long as the same site keeps making requests within a given timeout period, they will all be considered part of the same Visit. If the site makes a request to the server, and the length of time since the last request is greater than the specified timeout period, a new Visit is started and counted, and the sequence repeats. This measure is the closest data available to be able to track unique visits to the site, although it has the obvious limitation of the timeout period and the inability to track repeat visitors.

Pages, in this context, are those URLs that would be considered the actual page being requested and sent back to the user, and not all of the individual items that make it up (such as graphics and audio clips). Some people call this metric page views or page impressions, and defaults to any URL that has an extension of .htm, .html or .cgi.

### **2.2.6 Correspondence and Delegations to Council**

Correspondence with Council includes written inquiries, requests, and submissions for the agenda. Delegations are the groups that present to Council in meetings. A delegation is required to correspond with Council before attending a meeting to be heard, and it is important to acknowledge the increased level of commitment and energy involved in a delegation versus a piece of correspondence. Both of these indicators measure contacting officials, which is a sign of engagement that has been documented by other research (Keeter 2002;Livingstone 2008).

Letters to Council were collected from the public agendas available on the Town's website under the Correspondence and Delegation sections of the agendas. Only correspondence and delegations from residents or business owners with addresses in the town were included in the count. This represents those people that may have been impacted by the Visioning process. Those outside of the Town jurisdiction were minimally if at all involved in Visioning and are thus outside of the scope of this research.

Delegations represent the number of groups or individuals that come to Council meetings to present ideas or opinions. The number of delegations from residents and business owners as well as from outsiders presenting awards for Ladysmith achievements were counted. Awards are an important indication of large-scale activities and initiatives happening in the town, which is helpful in

assessing civic engagement. Counts were taken for six months preceding Visioning and for six months following.

### **2.2.7 Voter Turn-Out**

The rate of voter turnout is an important and well-accepted indicator of civic engagement (Community Foundations of Canada 2008; Keeter 2002; Livingstone 2008; Reed 2000). It measures the interest and commitment to civics in a very direct way- election of citizens' representatives to power. Comparative voter turn-out data was collected Civic Net BC's website from the municipal elections of 2005 to 2008.

### **2.2.8 Volunteer Rates**

Volunteer rates are a commonly used measure of civic engagement (Community Foundations of Canada 2008; Keeter 2002; Livingstone 2008; Reed 2000). Volunteering shows commitment to the community and interest in the actions and direction it takes. It is a direct investment of time and energy into the cause of community well-being.

Volunteer rates were collected from the Ladysmith Resources Centre Association (LRCA), the main social services provider in Ladysmith. The data collected is based on the monthly number of volunteers registering with the LRCA.

Studies have shown strong evidence about the ways in which volunteer and service programs contribute to the development of communities and individuals (Hyman and Levine 2008). My data is limited to the number of new

volunteers at the centre, and does not take into account any increased activity of existing volunteers, or of volunteers registered with other organizations in the community. The Resources Centre is, however, the only umbrella organization for community volunteers that is non-secular and does not require a membership for fees. For these reasons, as well as analysis of change, rather than numbers alone, the Resources Centre is a valid choice for changes in volunteer rate data. Counts will take place for six months preceding Visioning and for six months following.

## **2.3 Qualitative Data**

Twelve interviews were held with elected officials and staff of the Town of Ladysmith, as well as the consultant who presented and facilitated the process. A series of open and close-ended questions were asked to create a descriptive picture of the Visioning process and any changes in civic engagement that appeared to happen because of the Visioning process. This creates context, explores the original objectives of Visioning, and investigates the effects of the sessions on *broader civic engagement*. The interview question outline as found in Appendix 1 is a guide that left the opportunity to explore other avenues that came up in the interviews. Table 11 outlines the list of interviewees from the Town of Ladysmith.

**Table 2 - Interview Subjects**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Duties related to civic engagement</b>
Mayor	Chief executive and ceremonial official representing the people and needs of the jurisdiction. The current Mayor has a long history with Town of Ladysmith, providing extra perspective on changes
One incumbent councillor	Representatives of the public will. Have observations as councillors prior to Visioning
Two newly elected councillors	Representatives of the public will. Have observations about Visioning's impact on their recent increase in civic engagement
Two councillors from previous term	Current and former representatives of the public will. Have observations about Visioning's impact on civic engagement
City Manager	Administrative chief of the Town, responsible for all Town employees and accountable to Council. The current City Manager has a long history with Town of Ladysmith, providing extra perspective on changes
Planner	Deals with planning, rezoning, development permits, urban design. Has good perspective on changes in interaction with applicants and residents
Manager of Administrative Services	Deals with public communication. Has good perspective on correspondence, public relations, contact between residents and the Town
Corporate Officer	Guides the legislative matters of the Town, including elections, and Council processes

Corporate Services Co-ordinator	Manages Council meeting agendas, minutes, correspondence
Consulting Facilitator, Report Author	Planned, facilitated, and reported on the Visioning process

The interview questions were created to be open-ended and closed, unbiased, precise and rigorous, to provoke answers of high quality and validity (Babbie 2002). Questions ranged from general to specific and fact checking is part of the validation system. This involves verifying statements with printed records as well as with the statements of others. The qualitative data collected from interviews will be triangulated with quantitative and observed data so that when a majority indicate a change in behaviour, this finding is significant and will suggest increased *broader civic engagement*.

## 2.4 Reliability and Validity

Reliable and valid data were ensured through triangulation of data between the interview responses, quantitative indicators, and participatory observations collected from the Visioning sessions.

To maximize the replicability of the data, collection methods and data sources are stated explicitly, including the interview guideline. Consistency in interview questions, data filtering, and sampling timelines was maintained to produce the most valid and comparable data. The researcher acknowledges personal assumptions, connection to the process under study, and previous interactions with interviewees and that these might influence the study.



### 3: ANALYSIS

To establish the type of engagement the Visioning process was, these documented components of successful public engagement have been put in the context of Visioning:

1. *Did the process encourage multiple forms of speech and communication to ensure that all kinds of people have a real voice?* Visioning accomplished this by offering a variety of opportunities for interaction: attending sessions in person, submitting workbooks available at municipal facilities in person or online, commenting on the Visioning website, and phoning to offer comments or insight.
2. *Did the process make government listening as important as speaking?* In the Visioning process, confirmation of public views was an integral step of every session, as well as an overall check with the final *Confirming the Vision* session. The website was also an important mode of feedback because public comments and workbooks were posted online, demonstrating the priority of direct public voice.
3. *Did the process connect personal experience with public issues?* The Visioning process involved personal stories and emotions to evoke preferences that would shape Town form and character in a way that would maximize positive experiences. This was a way of engaging all participants, regardless of their knowledge of specialised aspects such as urban planning, design, or engineering. This paragraph from the final report describes the process:

*“This vision for Ladysmith was created through a creative and innovative process called “experience-driven planning”. This approach builds a community plan*

*around the experiences the community identifies that they want in their town.”(Holland 2009)*

There was no need for participants to have in-depth knowledge to articulate their past and desired future experience of the town, making the exercises more accessible to all.

4. *Did the process build trust and create a foundation for working relationships? Did it create ongoing processes as opposed to isolated events?* The series of six sessions during the two months of Visioning provided an opportunity to create relationships of trust between community members themselves, as well as with Town staff, elected officials, and the facilitator of the consulting firm. The time in between sessions allowed citizens to see their feedback being used and published. It also allowed them to continue dialogue with their neighbours and leaders during non-session times. Interviews revealed a perception that Town officials were more approachable after the sessions.
5. *Did the process explore a range of views about the nature of the issue?* Open discussion was encouraged in Visioning sessions before information was presented on different issues in the community. This was an opportunity for residents to express a variety of opinions.
6. *Did the process help people develop public judgment and create common ground for action? Did it provide a way for people to see themselves as actors and to be actors?* Common grounds for action were created through repeated statements empowering the community to initiate activities that were important to them, as opposed to relying on the municipality to act. One Councillor noted, “More participants were aware of

the need for volunteerism- aware that there is more to do than appreciate the Town.”

7. *Did the process connect to government, policymaking, and governance?*

The Mayor and members of Council were present at each meeting, and provided information on the implications of policy and government action, as well as the limitations of governance.

### **3.1 Participatory Observations**

My role in the Visioning process included involvement in planning and public relations. My observed data includes face to face interactions, emails, and personal reactions to the Visioning process.

The initiative for the Visioning process came directly from Mayor and Council, with staff in planning and policy roles supporting the aims of the elected officials and guiding the process to inform their decision-making as effectively as possible. While staff took a secondary role in the creation of the process, they participated in staff training days that engaged them in the implications of Visioning results in their jobs and in the community. While these sessions were valuable, additional engagement with staff at the early stages of Visioning would have been beneficial in creating buy-in and a sense of understanding that they could relay to citizens.

The Visioning process opened the floor for a variety of people to contribute to the strategic direction of the Town through their stories, ideas, and

opinions. My observations indicate that participants were gaining knowledge in these sessions and being inspired to involve themselves with local government in a context outside the scope of the Visioning process. For example, some residents decided they would run for office in the municipal election that followed the Visioning sessions and they noted the influence of the Visioning sessions in their decision, other residents contacted City Hall about applying for a Town Commission and indicated that Visioning had brought it to their awareness.

Some participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to learn more about their community and understand concepts of government process that had previously been unknown or incomprehensible to them. This indicated to me the need to display issues and potential solutions in accessible formats, because the issue may not be as much apathy from the community, but a lack of understanding.

The legislation of BC communities allows significant opportunity for public feedback; however, the existence of these forums does not seem to be widely understood by community members. The Visioning process introduced a forum that was more familiar and conceptually accessible for the public while also being a meaningful sharing of information between the Town and the citizens. The activities such as storytelling, role playing, and group idea construction (Innes and Booher 1999) that occurred in the Visioning Process were modes of consulting and collaborating, which are mid-level to high-levels of engagement (Bush, Gillson, and Hamilton 2005; Lukensmeyer and Torres 2008).

My experience with the Visioning process triggered the idea that these types of collaborative engagement sessions could unintentionally cause increased civic engagement beyond the scope of the sessions at hand. In my role as staff liaison for other projects, I noticed an increase in frequency of inquiry calls about various city services, decisions, and plans. In my role as staff liaison to the Environmental Commission, I noted an increased enthusiasm from members after the Visioning sessions, and significant mention of Visioning's catalytic effect driving further action on a variety of issues that were outside the main objectives of the Visioning sessions. This had the potential to both spur new action, as well as the potential to derail or slow the progress on previously agreed priorities.

Participatory observations point towards an increase in civic engagement beyond the scope of the Visioning series.

## **3.2 Quantitative Indicators**

### **3.2.1 Applications to Commissions**

Measuring potential changes in the number of applications to commissions assists in clarifying if there was increased engagement by citizens who wanted to be involved in the workings of City Hall. The number of applications to municipal commissions were counted for the spring 2008 and 2009 seasons. Despite perceptions from city staff that there were more applications after Visioning, the number was steady from the year before at 20. This indicates that the number of applications to become a Commission member

does not point towards an increase in civic engagement. There was an interview observation, however, that the demographics of applicants had shifted to include a younger generation than before, indicating a change in nature but not quantity of engagement. The personal demographics of applicants was not officially tracked, so no conclusions can be made here, but it would add an interesting component for further research to examine more closely the diversity of engaged citizens, in addition to focussing on the amount of engagement in general, as examined in this project.

Table 2 - Commission Applications

<b>Applications to Commissions</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
Number of applications	20	20	0%

### **3.2.2 Candidates Running for Council**

The number of candidates running in the municipal election is an indicator of the interest from the public in being involved at a high level of civic responsibility. In 2005, there were seven candidates running for Council positions. In 2008, there were ten (Table 3). In both cases, the Mayor was acclaimed. This statistic in itself does not demonstrate the effects of Visioning but in the context of the qualitative data presented later, it supports the discussion about citizens being motivated to run for Council because of Visioning.

Table 3 - Council Candidates

Candidates running for Town Council	2005	2008	Percent Change
Number of candidates	7	10	+43%

### 3.2.3 Media Keywords

Media keywords are an exploration of perceived public interest in local governance, as the mandate of media is to report on subjects of the public's interest. Table 4 identifies the media key words that were collected to note their frequency from before to after the Visioning series.

Table 4 – Media Keywords

Media Keyword	Possible variations that will be captured
Town	Town
Mayor	Mayor
council*	Councillor, councillors
participat*	Participation, participate, participated,
involve*	Involve, involvement, involved
civic*	Civic, civics, civically
consult*	Consult, consulted, consultation
Commission	Commission
engage*	Engage, engaged, engagement

Table 5 displays the change in frequency of keywords found in the Ladysmith Chronicle from before and after the Visioning process. The values represent the number of keywords that pertain to local issues, not to regional, national, or other issues, which were all filtered out.

Table 5 – Media Keyword Frequency

<b>Media Keyword</b>	<b>Jan-June 2008 Before Visioning</b>	<b>Jan-June 2009 After Visioning</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
Town	155	170	+10%
Mayor	64	97	+52%
council*	91	113	+24%
participat*	29	57	+97%
involve*	68	98	+44%
civic*	7	8	+14%
consult*	33	42	+27%
commission	27	26	-4%
engage*	7	24	+243%
<b>Total</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>+44%</b>

Analysis of the nine media keywords shows that only one decreased in frequency from before to after the Visioning series, and the change was minimal, with a difference of only one media instance. All other keywords showed an increase of 14% or more. In some cases, the numbers are low enough that the



change is not significant, such as the increase of one instance with the keyword “civic\*”. However, in all the other cases, the change is more drastic and notable in terms of indicating a change in the newspapers’ focus on reader interest in community engagement issues.

Analysis of all articles containing the keywords included the identification of citizen letters to the editor. The activity of writing a letter to the editor for publication is an important act of civic engagement because it involves public issues and recognition. Different from an article that people are interested in reading, a letter sent to the newspaper indicates a stronger commitment to engaging with the community.

Table 6 - Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor	2008	2009	Percent Change
Number of letters from Ladysmith residents	51	55	+8%

The samples collected from January to June of 2008 and 2009 were edited to include only letters from Ladysmith residents. A small increase in quantity was observed and points mildly to increased civic engagement.

#### **3.2.4 Website Visits**

By measuring changes in the number of website visits before and after the Community Visioning series, another piece of the engagement puzzle will be filled – increased website visits is one factor that would point towards increased *broader civic engagement*.

Exogenous factors such as weather causing service disruptions cause residents to contact and interact with the Town more often. This was kept in mind when interpreting the website visits, but its effects appear to be negligible.

Table 7 - Website Visits and Pages Requested

<b>Town of Ladysmith website</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Percent change</b>
Visits	74,729	66,663	-11%
Pages	288,352	291,003	+1%

The number of visits to the website did not increase from before to after the Visioning sessions. The -11% change represents a decrease in interest in the Town of Ladysmith's website. One reason for this may be that residents felt better connected, informed and possibly apathetic due to the Visioning. Another reason may be that Visioning had no effect on this indicator and that external factors drove this change.

Change in the number of pages is negligible, and points to no increase in civic engagement due to the Visioning process.

### **3.2.5 Correspondence and Delegations to Council**

Correspondence and delegations are forums for citizens to directly express community issues to their governing body.

Table 8 - Delegations and Correspondence to Council

<b>Council Agendas</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
Delegations	8	9	+13%
Correspondence	29	21	-30%

Analysis of the quantity of correspondence shows that there is a decrease in communication to Council through this medium from before to after the Visioning sessions. This may be attributed to citizen understanding or apathy on issues addressed in Visioning. There was a slight increase in the number of delegations that Council saw, which is a mild indicator that higher commitment engagement remained relatively level, as it takes more effort to appear as a delegation that send in a piece of correspondence.

### **3.2.6 Voter Turn-Out**

The rate of voter turnout is an important and well-accepted indicator of civic engagement (Community Foundations of Canada 2008; Keeter 2002; Livingstone 2008; Reed 2000). It measures the interest and commitment to civics in a very direct way- election of citizens' representatives to power. Voter turnout as recorded on Civic Net BC's website from the municipal elections of 2005 to 2008 increased by 0.45 percentage points. This change is minimal and does not indicate significant increases in civic engagement, although it does show a small growth in voter turnout. In an interview, the Corporate Officer commented on voter turnout:

*“I thought [Visioning] would have had more impact on municipal election voter turnout [but] controversy stimulates voters to get out and vote and I guess the Visioning wasn’t seen to be controversial. People were reasonably happy so there was apathy in voting.” (Bowden, 2009)*

As alluded to, the motivation behind voting is an important factor to consider when looking at turnout statistics.

Table 9 - Voter Turnout

Voting	2005	2008	Percent Change
Estimated eligible voters	5400	5682	+5.22%
Ballots cast	1260	1352	+7.30%
Voter Turnout	23.33%	23.79%	0.45 percentage points

### 3.2.7 Volunteer Rates

In Ladysmith’s case, volunteer rates as reported by the Resources Centre dropped by 25% from the first half of 2008 to the first half of 2009. Volunteer application numbers went from 24 to 18 in those six month time periods. This indicates that there was not an increase in that type of civic engagement; in fact, there was a decrease in civic involvement according to that indicator.

Table 10 - Volunteer Rates

	2008	2009	Percent Change
Volunteer applications	24	18	-25%

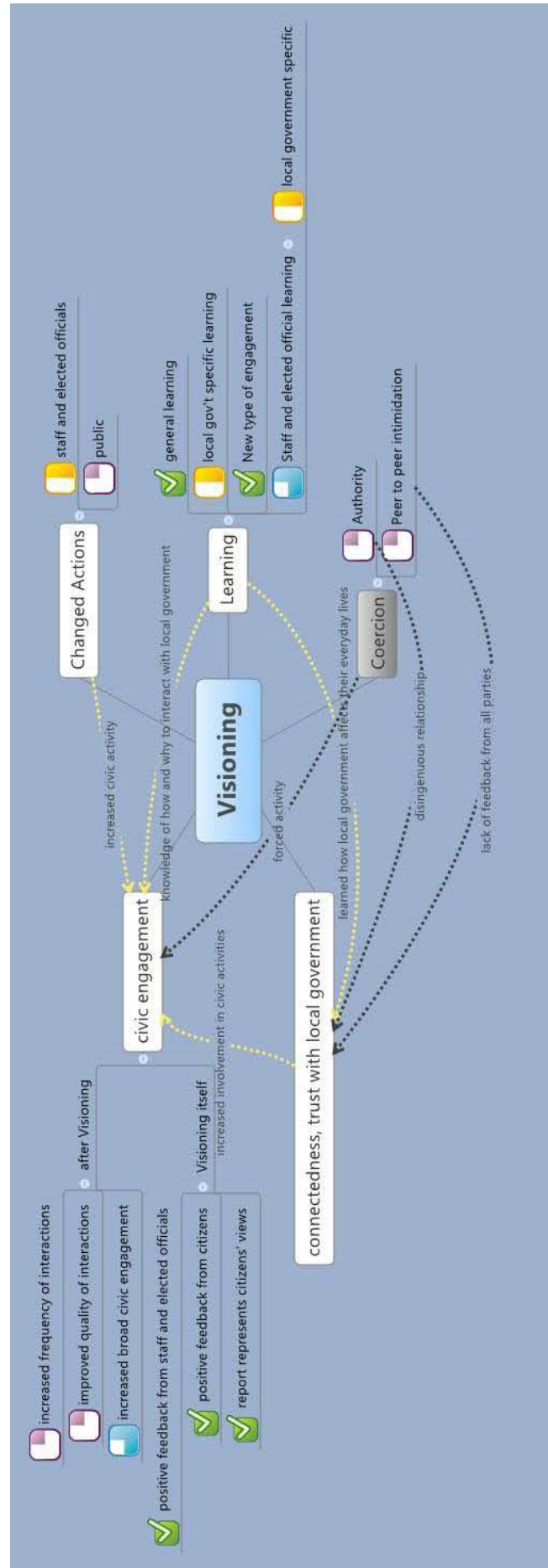
### 3.3 Qualitative Data

Twelve elite interviews created context, explored the original objectives of Visioning, and investigated the effects of the sessions on *broader civic engagement*. This section discusses Visioning's connection to Learning, creating connectedness and trust between citizens and local government, coercion, changing citizen actions, and ultimately, affecting civic engagement levels. the

As outlined in Figure 4, and indicated by the proportion of checkbox filled by colour, the elite interview data shows that learning took place, both in general, and specific to local government issues. This means citizens had the opportunity to gain connectedness, trust and knowledge about how and why they would interact with local government, an act of civic engagement. People may be influenced to do so because they learned how local government affects their everyday lives and how they can stay informed or impact local government decisions by voicing their opinions. There was little evidence that the sessions involved coercion of participants, but the amount that was noted either could have forced civic engagement by citizens who felt forced to do so, or it could have created a lack of trust with the Town, decreasing the chances of civic engagement. In the case of peer-to-peer intimidation, the Town would miss out on feedback from those participants who were intimidated during group Visioning activities. In general, a change in the public's behaviour was not obvious, although staff behaviour change levels were viewed to be higher. Slight increases in frequency and quality of staff interactions with the public were noted during the six month time period after the Visioning sessions, but overall civic

engagement levels were seen to have increased. Feedback about the Visioning process itself, and the resulting report that will lead future actions were both glowing in nearly all cases. This chapter will further investigate the details of the qualitative data collected.


### Figure 3 – Relationships of Qualitative Responses



The interview responses indicated a common understanding of the purpose of the Visioning process, including to *“Get the community’s input on what they wanted Ladysmith to be in the future,” “to look at where we’re at, and where we’re going,”* to answer the question, *“What type of Town do you want to live in?”* to establish *“the will of the people and what they saw the future of the town being.”*

Respondents largely agreed that they had never experienced or heard of a similar process being held in a municipal context, and that this process was unique in that sense.

*Can you identify any benefits to participants?*



Yes 100%

Respondents felt participants received value from the Visioning exercises due to a more open forum for discussion, increased learning, and an opportunity to connect with other members of the community.

Participants took away new knowledge from sessions. The Mayor reported,

*“Many participants told me, ‘I didn’t know \_\_\_\_\_[and I learned about it at Visioning]’. There was a tremendous amount of education not only about the community but also about sustainable communities and [their] characteristics. I heard people say it was very enriching that way.”(Hutchins 2009)*

Not only did people learn during the sessions, they created new connections within their community. “[The participants] had a forum to connect with other members of the community and to share their thoughts and ideas.” said the Corporate Services Coordinator (Kalina 2009). This is indicative of new



relationships and awareness being formed that help create a sense of community that might encourage people to be more involved in community decision-making.

The Visioning facilitator, Mark Holland noted that,

*“Participants made unique relationships that might not have otherwise happened. Most of our common ground with people these days is not place-based, but this allowed people to come together over where they live. This is a rare experience.” (Holland 2009b)*

One Councillor mentioned that participants gained a feeling of ownership of the direction of the town, and a sense of belonging to the community (Paterson 2009). All of these quotations build on the idea of belonging to a community, which increases one’s stake in being involved in community activities.

It was the

*“Town’s first really open invitation for folks to come and speak up with all sorts of other people there, not be criticised or not be looked upon as you would be perhaps sitting at the end of the Council table where you might be scrutinized on every word you might say.” (Christensen 2009)*

Open, collective dialogue is a way of engaging stakeholders that may have otherwise been intimidated or disinterested in the opinion-based, adversarial context that many municipal meetings have a reputation for fostering. The different types of engagement allow participants to speak about their ideas without necessarily supporting one side or another; the Visioning sessions offered participants the ability to learn together about a diversity of perspectives on issues. They were not constrained to a time limit for a speaker’s list, and they had a significant amount of time to talk with others who shared the issue through another lens. Their exposure to new ideas was of course limited to those

participants who chose to attend, a population that may not have fully represented Ladysmith's residents.

*Was the process a success? - Staff and elected officials*



The feedback from interviewees indicated that for the most part they thought the Visioning sessions were a success, evidenced by statements such as, *“Great exercise,” “Incredible process,” “Very worthwhile,”* and *“Hugely successful.” “[The Visioning process] aligned our values with the community’s values.”* There was one notable exception in the respondents that felt, *“Conceptually, Visioning had it right, but the method was wrong.”* He felt there was a predetermined outcome, with too much time spent presenting the process to people with limited time for all to participate in discussions about the economic and social consequences of potential choices. It should be noted here that this same respondent, a former Councillor that was in office for the decision to bring Visioning to Town, consistently responded contrary to the majority on most questions, as is consistent with his general behaviour from his time on Council.

When examining the important factors in planning projects, participants in a study in the U.S. were asked, what dimensions characterize successful public participation in a messy setting? Participants provided the following answers: writing a plan and implementing it; learning; interest representation; relationship building; creating responsibility; and gaining social and political acceptability (McCool 2001). Apart from writing a concrete plan and implementing it (which is

scheduled to occur in 2009 and beyond), the Visioning process met the criteria described.

*Was the process a success? - Participants*



On the subject of public feedback about the process, the results showed a positive response in most cases, citing the community appreciation for being involved, and having the opportunity to be heard. The City Manager believes success was *“proven by the growing numbers [of participants] in sessions [from the start to the finish of the process], which is unusual. Usually people’s energy diminishes as time goes on.”* (Malli 2009) Another staff member noted they, *“Haven’t heard anybody say, “What a waste of money that was” which is the usual response received in other municipalities [on projects of a similar nature].”*(Bowden 2009) Many respondents noted they have heard nothing but positive feedback from residents.

In the case of Ladysmith, City Council is able to use the results of the visioning process to make more legitimate, informed decisions when deliberating on Town matters and the public has access to all those decisions made. The information gathered from over one hundred people on an overarching vision for the future created a base of knowledge that is more representative than the regular number of people who correspond with elected officials regarding Council decisions. As all input from the Visioning sessions is public, citizens can hold their representatives accountable when they make decisions in the future.

Because they put effort into drafting the Visioning report, they may feel more attachment to the resulting decisions, and involve themselves, either by staying informed, or by taking action in the future to ensure their ideas continue to be supported.

*Did the Report reflect the views of participants?*



All but one respondent felt the final report represented the public's views accurately. He felt there was a lack of representation of seniors, young families, low-income residents, and members of the business community, so their views were not voiced in the Report. He felt that only citizens with an agenda attended the sessions, so only those people had their opinions reflected in the Report.

Subversive tactics and co-optation from government or from public sources is a concern when any public engagement is undertaken. Although this is a valid consideration, the Visioning series had a low potential for subversion due to meeting the qualities of an open and legitimate engagement context, as described in the previous section Measuring Engagement. After the presentation of potential directions to take, most of the note taking and discussions were initiated by public participants and no idea was quelled or disregarded, as all participant notes were published on the website, and the public had an opportunity to review the report content in a Confirming the Vision session. There was no respondent who felt the Visioning participants' views were not recorded in the report.

### 3.3.1 Presence of coercion or a predetermined outcome

Was there guidance towards a predetermined outcome?



When asked if they thought the Visioning series was guided to come to a pre-determined outcome, most respondents answered in the negative. They cited the variety of modes to interact, including written, spoken, and visual options offered ways to communicate without any chance of conflict. Some comments indicated there was guidance, but that it was open-ended in many ways. One newly elected Councillor who acted as a participant in Visioning noted, *“Discussion was steered to better thinking but to be fair if you just stand in front of a room and say ‘what do you think?’ there will be silence.”* Another said, *“There was a flavour and there was a lead,”* but added she did not feel participants’ opinions were suppressed.

There is the potential that participants may feel as though their voice has been heard and considered in decisions, when in reality, choices had been made by those in power without regard to public input. Alternatively, those in positions of power may legitimately listen and consider input and still make a different decision. It is subjective to draw a line between preconceived outcomes, and merely making an independent decision after hearing all the input. In the case of Visioning, one out of eleven elite interview respondents believed that the results of Visioning were pre-ordained. When asked if they felt the participants had been guided to respond a certain way, most replied that there had been a wide variety

of options. When asked if they felt there had been an atmosphere of authority using pressure or fear tactics, they all responded no.

However, some unwanted guidance was noted. One Councillor at the time of Visioning expressed frustration with the choices given in many of the visual preference activities and notebook questions. He summarized those options as:

- a. pure crap*
- b. meh, so what?*
- c. paradise”*

(Johnson 2009)

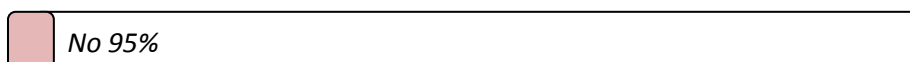
He felt that issues such as infrastructure, economic feasibility, and attracting investment were not included in the discussion. In my participatory observations, I noted that people were discussing impacts on the local economy, including how to attract investment and jobs to the area. There was also discussion about the form of infrastructure, for example, examining more environmentally sustainable energy systems, and how that would change the look of the town. I did not notice exact price tags being associated with these new ideas, but the discussion was at a high level, where it seemed that actual figures would be inappropriate and lack meaning when there was such a wide range of possibilities and extents.

The exploratory format of the Visioning sessions was another important factor in the legitimacy of its findings. In asking people to describe their objectives with an open-ended question, there is less opportunity for those in power to influence their answers. This was especially poignant in the Visioning sessions, where participants' core motivations and desires were exposed through exploring their favourite moments, evoked feelings, and hopes for the future in

terms of values, instead of their interpretation of the right product that would meet those base needs and wishes.

There was also space for criticism. Legitimate engagement permits negative feedback to occur, which is an important aspect of genuine public participation (Dryzek 1987; McCool 2001). In the Visioning sessions, criticism was voiced, respected, and included in the reporting and posting process, allowing others to absorb critical perspectives on the Town and its decisions.

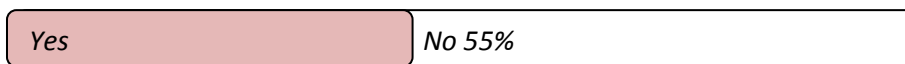
The potential for co-optation must be acknowledged, but in the context of the Visioning processes, the likelihood of subversion is low due to the open context of notebooks, the website, and the social networking arenas that were unmoderated by Town staff or officials. To more comprehensively research the issue of potential coercion in this process, a broad sample of participants should be surveyed. This is beyond the scope of this particular project but would be a valuable direction for future research.



*Do you know of anyone that felt they were intimidated to speak their opinion?  
(by the Town, facilitator, or other participants)*

In terms of intimidation or authority exercised by participants' peers at the discussion tables, it was felt that this happens at all public gatherings, but that the alternate methods of responding in the Visioning series (notebooks, visual preferences, larger group discussions) were effective in evoking genuine responses from all participants.

Assumptions and constraints are explored, often using a process of collective fact-finding which recognizes different ways of knowing about the issues under discussion and helps create conditions for participants to learn *together* about the issues they face (Corburn 2005; McCreary 1999). This is an important aspect of the Visioning series in terms of people learning together in an environment where no one was wrong, and no one “won or lost”. It was more social, providing a place for sharing conversation, food, and ideas, but with a central focus and a professional facilitator who could generally guide the topics. There is the potential that they would be both more informed and more attracted to engage with their municipality in general.



*Were there unintended effects of the Visioning process?*

When asked if the Visioning series had any unintended consequences the City Planner responded:

*“[Participants] have a chance to express opinions that otherwise come out in negative ways at unrelated public hearings, etc. At Visioning, they can hear each others’ opinions and realise there’s not just one way to go about it. It’s important for them to see it’s complex – there’s lots of interests. It is different from public hearings or Council meetings – in Visioning you could have discussions and the ear of the Mayor and Council members and staff and see other perspectives.” (Brinkman 2009)*

Increasing awareness that there is a spectrum of needs and ways to meet those needs, was an important stated outcome of the Visioning process.

The City Manager responded:

*“Our position as an employer became stronger. Higher engagement keeps employees excited and Visioning has probably attracted new staff.”*



This was substantiated when the Manager of Administrative Services noted that when she was applying to the Town of Ladysmith in the summer of 2008, she found out about the Visioning process:

*"It made me all the more determined that Ladysmith was a great place to work. It helped reinforce that it was the right decision to come. It's a brave thing for a community to do." (Winter 2009)*

The Manager of Human Resources indicated that Visioning has come up in interviews for Town positions, although it was never explicitly stated as the applicant's reason for applying.

One former Councillor felt that an unintended effect of the Visioning process was that it slowed things down in the workings of the Town. He cited projects such as the Spirit Square, a proposed community-based common area, where he said, "We lost a year because they were put on hold during the Visioning process." (Johnson 2009)

### 3.3.2 Learning



*Did you learn anything at the Visioning sessions? – Staff and elected officials*

When asked, Did you learn anything? most respondents responded in the positive.

*"Yes, whether it was the way an area should be or shouldn't or timing, things like designs.... suggestions or ideas that I thought, 'that's cool, I'd never thought about that'." (Christenson 2009)*

It was noted that others learned about the city planning process, about the community and the people in it, and about sustainability. The following three quotes elaborate in more detail:

*“Every meeting you would learn how sustainability is implemented.” (Malli 2009)*

*“I learned about development of community: how you plan and build a community, density, planning and sustainability.” (Kalina 2009)*

*“Green design and development is changing and evolving so quickly. There was a flood of knowledge to be learned and Mark was so knowledgeable about that.” (Brinkman 2009)*

The expertise offered by the consultant was valuable in educating the public on proven, innovative, and feasible options that were available to them. It was important to have an experience professional in the field frame possibilities, answer questions knowledgeably, and adjust people’s perceptions to align more closely with realistic expectations.

One of the spin-off consequences of the Visioning process was education and engagement on the impact the municipality has on the decision-making, function, and appearance of the everyday life of the Town. Some citizens were exposed for the first time to the meaning and influence of public hearings, delegations to council, municipal jurisdiction, and resident voice in Council decision-making.

The Visioning series was the initial step in writing policy and action documents. It provided participants with education on the possible directions Ladysmith could take, how those pathways worked, how their interests could be

met, how they could work together to make it happen, who they could hold accountable, and how they could feel a part of this political and social agency.

Two respondents felt they did not learn anything at the sessions and that they already understood the pulse of the community. When one was asked if he learned anything, he responded,

*"I don't think so. I know so many people in the community. I 'm connected. I am the second or third most recognizable person in town." (Johnson 2009)*

This type of answer reflects a feeling that increased civic engagement in general was unnecessary, and that the official already felt adequately connected to the pulse of the community.



*Did you learn anything about local government at the Visioning sessions? – Staff and elected officials*

The interview question, Did you learn anything about local government at the Visioning sessions? was aimed mostly at participants that later ran for Council positions, and has less relevance for staff and elected officials that have been working within the local government system for a significant amount of time. Half of respondents felt they had learned something about local government in general or about the Town of Ladysmith's government specifically.



*Was the level of new knowledge transfer to participants significant?*

Significant new knowledge was transferred to participants according to 88% of interview respondents. Respondents felt the participants gained a “better

*understanding of what it takes to make things happen, how and why they are done the way they are.”(Paterson 2009)* Another education point was the realisation that the Town *“can achieve multiple objectives simultaneously, and develop in a way that is sensitive to the natural environment, enhances the natural environment.”* (Winter 2009) The process was said to be de-polarizing, which educated people that issues are generally not all good or all bad, and that there is a spectrum of ways to deal with a challenge that may meet values and objectives, instead of focussing on one solution on which people have strong opinions .

The consultant and leader of the sessions stated that compared to other exercises he has led, the Ladysmith Visioning sessions showed the

*“**Highest knowledge transfer ever-** not due to delivery but due to better retention by participants because of the experiential nature of the process. They learned how they can get what they want. They had an interest in learning. A lot of people came up to me at breaks in the sessions and said things like ‘That was interesting. I learned a lot. I never knew how that worked before’.”* (Holland 2009b)

This qualitative data suggests that indeed there was significant learning that occurred during the Visioning sessions, which supports the presence of the first step in the hypothesis that greater understanding of the system and its processes may increase broader civic engagement. It remains less clear whether or not this understanding results in further engagement.



*Do you feel participants learned more about how local government functions and what impact it has on their lives?*

Seven out of eleven respondents felt that participants learned more about the jurisdiction and functioning of local government. This may have an impact on citizen's interests in becoming more involved in civics because they better understand how it will benefit them and their community. The Visioning series provided anecdotal and visual representations of the effects of local government decisions in Ladysmith and other places in the world. These new types of examples may have more effectively been integrated into participants' understanding of their quality of life, as opposed to knowing vaguely of a Mayor and Council making decisions that seem distant from everyday life.

### 3.3.3 Affecting Change



*Did the Visioning sessions change any choices or actions in your life or job?*

Seven out of nine respondents felt Visioning had affected choices or actions in their lives and jobs. The most powerful and obvious change was the decision to run for office due to interactions at the Visioning sessions. A newly elected Councillor explains how the sessions affected his civic engagement:

*"I ran for Council. I'm [also] a little more committed to staying in Town because I like the community and see more potential in Town than before Visioning." (Whittington 2009)*

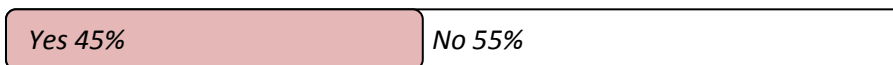
Staff found changes in their work behaviour, dealing with co-workers and with Council and the public:

*"I am more pro-active about promoting green design. I interact more with other staff and I push, like asking them if they've read the Visioning report. I have a tool now." (Brinkman 2009)*

*“When we prepare staff reports we look at it from Visioning perspective. It’s one of the elements considered first. The sustainability factor- that’s huge here now. The Visioning helped bring that out. It’s now easier to make supported recommendations from citizens.”(Bowden 2009)*

Others reported changing behaviour at home, becoming more ecologically sustainable, and including new information in decision-making, such as where they would choose to live based on newly learned development and planning processes. The majority of respondents had significantly changed actions or choices because of the Visioning process. This points to the power of the Visioning series to affect change in individuals’ lives.

### 3.3.4 Civic Engagement Changes



*Have you noticed other people’s actions in relation to the Town have changed since the Visioning process finished?*

Less than half of respondents felt other people’s actions towards the Town had changed since the Visioning process. Many believed those who were involved after were already involved before the process began. Those that commented further about changes mentioned,

*“The learning of new concepts which a year ago would have been foreign to public such as the vegetable garden on City Hall lawn. That was extremely well received by staff and community - Visioning increased awareness [of its benefits].”(Hutchins 2009)*

*“People hang on to [Visioning] as an expression of community.” (Whittington 2009)*

The City Planner believes Visioning brought out the voices of the Environmental Commission. *“Ladysmith is labelled as a green community.*

*Visioning jumpstarted individuals to be proactive in their own lives and brought the subject to the fore.” (Brinkman 2009)*

The City Manager noted,

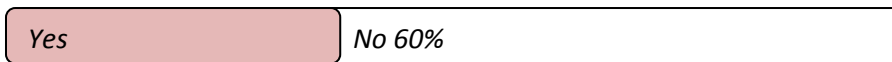
*“[People are] more receptive to green choices such as the Credit Union smart car, organics and recycling – they are boasting now whereas three years ago they were resisting, saying sorting garbage was the municipality’s job. Applications for greener houses have increased, people are asking for info on retrofits. There is increased demand for what we want to achieve.” (Malli 2009)*

The strength of connection between Visioning and changes in citizen activity with the Town is minimal, but the descriptions provided by staff and elected officials indicate that there is a connection there in some cases. The Mayor, City staff and some councillors attended all the Visioning sessions and provided information about the processes that shaped development in the community. Involvement and presence of City staff and officials is important in building trust and creating a culture of support for citizen involvement (Robinson 2005).

Visioning had a role in raising awareness of the role that community members can have in local government decision making and the way their town looks and feels. Having engaged them in one government process (Visioning) has broken the ice to make engagement in other processes less foreign, making it easier for them to participate, and harder for them to expect others to take on all the responsibility. As the creator and facilitator of the Visioning process described,

*“Participants invested time in the process so that probably inspired the desire to engage more. Many stakeholders were involved, the vision needs to be revisited. There is a call to stay involved, and that it is not someone else’s responsibility to make sure this happens and is kept current. I hope they feel more empowered to respond in a more pro-active way to development and city*

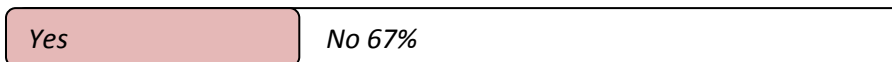
*building now that they have lost the fear of it. This could happen in the form of less opposition and more pro-activity. They will be able to give better feedback about what they want [their town] to be like.”(Holland, 2009b)*



*Have you noticed an increase in the number or frequency of citizens contacting you at your job after the Visioning process?*

Most respondents could not pinpoint any change in the frequency with which citizens were contacting them at their jobs from before to after the Visioning series. There was acknowledgement that staff and elected officials seemed more approachable and there was more participation by staff in issues brought up in the Visioning series. One Councillor said,

*“There are definitely some people from Visioning that now come to Council. There’s not a lot of them but there’s a couple of them. They feel it is their right and honour to be in the room, which it is.”(Dashwood 2009)*



*Have you noticed an increase in the quality of interactions with citizens at your job after the Visioning process?*

Similar to the previous question, most respondents had not noticed a change. The ones that did noted,

*“Previous to Visioning, all I had was the OCP. I knew Council wanted to go in a green direction but had nothing saying Council endorses this; it’s not just my word for it. The Visioning Report offers proof of what the town and Council wants. This has changed interactions with developers. There is more support. They don’t try to get away with things. It forces them to face reality sooner. or maybe stops a call to Mayor to see if what I am saying is accurate.” (Brinkman 2009)*

*“The Chamber of Commerce, the Historical Society – interest groups – feel their role is more meaningful. The Town tried to recognize these roles through the Visioning process. It was an important voice and venue for people to have.” (Bowden 2009)*



Yes 71%

No

*Do you think the Visioning process motivated people to become more involved with civic activities with the Town after the Visioning process was over?*

The perception of increased civic engagement was noted by 71% of respondents. One newly elected Councillor recalled,

*"Early on in the process I had met Lori Evans (another newly elected Councillor) and she ultimately ran for Council and she got at least one neighbour to come out to the Visioning sessions, so it got people talking. She wouldn't have run without Visioning. I would not have run for office this year if not for Visioning. Visioning really sped it up." (Whittington 2009)*

The following seven quotes reflect other aspects of increased civic engagement that were noted:

*"It's a pretty civically active town anyways, but there were a couple of people running for municipal election because of Visioning." (Brinkman 2009)*

*"[Participants] feel like they have a stake in it now. They feel a part of it. We had more people apply [for Commissions] than we had room on them. We had some people returning to Committees and Commissions that had been off for a couple of years and I think that's a really positive thing that they want to become re-involved. I think the Visioning really excited people and made them feel way more a part of things." (Winter 2009)*

*"There are a few new faces in the crowd." (Bowden 2009)*

*"A few more participants were aware of the need for volunteerism- aware that there is more to do than appreciate the Town." (Paterson 2009)*

*"People running for office used Visioning in their platforms." (Malli 2009)*

*"There is more event attendance, more inclusion, [the public] knows names – they can't as easily put off the work on a faceless person. They have the idea we all need to help." (Dashwood 2009)*

*"Different people were applying - applicants were younger this year – 30s and early 40s. Typically Committees and Commissions are made up of retired and semi-retired people." (Winter 2009)*

An increase in the diversity of people applying to be involved in a formal Town role is an important indicator of a change in civic engagement.

### 3.3.5 Newspaper and website comments

Additional qualitative data was taken from the local newspaper and the Visioning website. Here are two excerpts:

*"Thank for this opportunity to **learn** and share ideas and thoughts. This was a great day, so important to give the community the opportunity to give their input."*

*– Visioning participant's comments in workbook posted on website*

*"Many participants expressed that it was the most interesting and fulfilling planning process they had ever participated in – primarily because it allowed them to focus on what they cared about and **explore options** for their town **in the terms they understood**."*

*– Visioning Report*

Quotes from the Ladysmith Chronicle newspaper show the importance of Visioning in the time before the election:

*"What would you do about that issue if elected?"*

*Implement key recommendations of the visioning process" – Steve Arnett, new candidate for Council (Arnett 2008)*

*Jillian Dashwood (new candidate for Council) said the visioning process will have an impact on future planning. "I think it's been really important for all of us to get together and listen to each other." (Thompson 2008)*

*"If elected to council, what would you do?"*

*I suggest that we develop a priority spending plan, based on the 'visioning report'"*

*-Lori Evans, new candidate for Council (Thompson 2008)*

The prevalence of the Visioning process in multiple election platforms indicates that it was a meaningful process that people related to, and found important enough to value in the broader election process. It also suggests that these new candidates were inspired by the content of the Visioning series, to take those ideas and turn them into action by running for office. Election to office would allow them the ability to have the most direct impact on local government decision-making.

## Discussion and Conclusion

With all the potential ramifications of a Community Visioning process on existing forums of civic engagement, it is important to come back to the relevance of the quality of participation in the exercise. Without high quality initial engagement, spin off benefits are much less likely to occur; however, it must be acknowledged that there are limitations in existing literature that prevent precise and consistent articulation of the concept of a participation or engagement hierarchy (Rowe 2005). We can begin with the semantics of those two words: participation and engagement. There is no consensus on which is higher quality, or if there is in fact a difference between them.

These limitations continue to the use of the ladders of engagement. There are many different versions of the hierarchy in literature, but there are gaps that have not been completely addressed (Collins 2006) which is a fundamental reason why no one model adequately contextualized the core aspects of the Visioning process.

Quantitative indicators point towards a slight increase in *broader civic engagement*, with five indicators showing an increase and only three showing a decrease and one showing no change.

Table 11 - Summary of Quantitative Trends

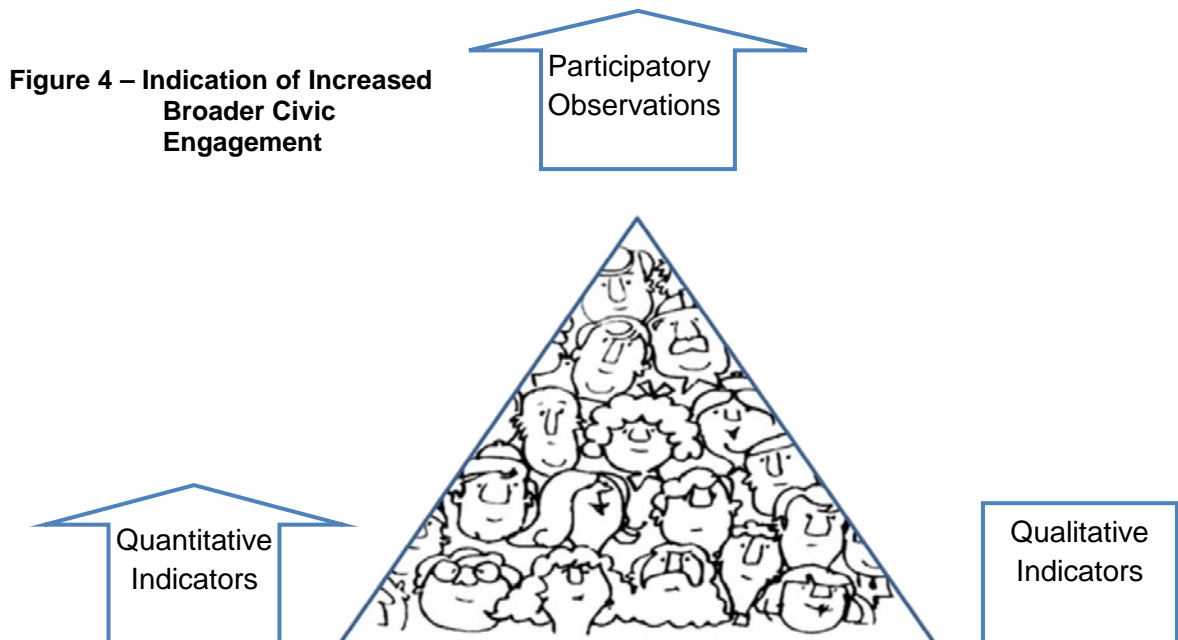
Quantitative Indicator	General trend of engagement
Applications to Commissions	No change
Media Key Words	Increase
Letters to the Editor	Increase
Website visits	Decrease
Correspondence to Council	Decrease
Delegations to Council	Increase
Candidates running for Council	Increase
Voter turnout	Increase
Volunteer rates	Decrease

The qualitative indicators as interpreted from elite interviews show no change in civic engagement after the Visioning sessions as well. No indicators show a decrease in participation, two demonstrate an increase, and three out of five examined here show no change.

Table 12 - General Trends of Qualitative Indicators

Qualitative Indicator	General Trend of Engagement
Increase in frequency or number of interactions with public	No Change
Increase in quality of interactions with public	No Change
Changes in own life and actions	Increase
Perceived changes in other people's lives and actions	No Change
Perceived increase in public's civic engagement	Increase

The majority of indicators – quantitative and participatory observations – point towards the trend that the Visioning series in Ladysmith increased *broader civic engagement* beyond the initiative's timeline and scope. The qualitative indicators show little or no change, but taking into account all indicators the trend is a slight increase in engagement, as summarized visually in Figure 3.



This preliminary finding is an important step towards understanding and applying civic engagement in a local government context. It also serves as a platform for more comprehensive research on the subject.

### **3.4 Policy Implications and Areas for Further Study**

Local governments are facing increasing pressure to involve the public in decision-making and deliberation. There is growing interest from citizens to become involved or to be heard, and municipalities have an interest in engaging them so that they can share the responsibility of decision-making and the consequences in the community.

The Visioning process held in Ladysmith is an example of one exercise meant to evoke the participation of its citizens. The analysis in this research project is meant to be a preliminary investigation into the effectiveness of involving the community, both during the series of sessions, but with a more concerted focus on broader civic engagement lasting beyond the last session.

Continued study to elaborate on the findings of this project might involve surveying all Ladysmith residents, and collecting longitudinal quantitative data from a longer time period. Comparative studies involving other municipalities would help improve the validity of the findings. Using communities close in geography, demographics and population size would help filter out exogenous factors such as market changes, socio-economic trends, and extreme weather events. This would create a more detailed picture of how to recreate broad civic engagement benefits from an event-based initiative.

The data in this project points towards a trend in increased civic engagement outside of the Visioning sessions. It provides valuable information about the potential components of public engagement that have spin-off effects of increasing engagement past the point of planned exercises, to include civic participation in forums such as Council meetings, the media, and the voluntary sector of the community. This information may be transferrable to other communities that seek increased levels of public participation. Differences in population and geographic size would need to be taken in to account, especially when working with metropolitan areas. Elected officials and staff in larger cities face different challenges in creating trusting interpersonal relationships and a sense of accountability when they have a variety of communities under their jurisdiction that may have different senses of identities and needs that need to be balanced with the amount of time and resources available. Sometimes neighbouring community needs can be pitted against one another for funding or staff resources, and the communities cannot as clearly see the critical path from engagement to policy to action when there are more things occurring simultaneously that impact timing and priority level.

As an example of a larger city trying to increase its citizen engagement, the mayor and seven councillors for the City of Vancouver, BC, were elected with a platform promising increased civic engagement.

*“The Vision Vancouver-dominated city council was elected last fall based on a platform of citizen engagement, openness, improved process, community consultation, and grassroots neighbourhood-based planning.” (Jacobs 2009)*

The city passed a motion to launch a Citizen Summit in late 2009. The Summit is to be part of an ongoing process of improving citizen engagement on public policy and planning decisions in Vancouver. It is loosely based on consulting and visioning initiatives from Calgary and Montreal, which also have an expressed interest in increasing their public engagement. The Visioning spin-off benefits will be of interest to these cities, because it has the potential to add value to their projects with a broader impact on civic engagement through existing channels that will last beyond any single initiative and incur little or no additional financial cost. In a time where demand for engagement is high, and financial resources are low, this is a particularly relevant and timely subject for further attention.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Interview Questions for staff and elected officials

- 1.What was the objective of the Visioning process?
- 2.Have you participated or learned of a process similar to the Visioning series before? What were the similarities or differences?
- 3.What was your role in the Visioning process?
- 4.What is your feedback from the Visioning process?
- 5.What is the feedback you have heard from citizens about the Visioning process?
- 6.Has there been any feedback from the public that the final report does not represent their views? Describe.
- 7.During the Visioning Sessions, did you feel guided to respond in a certain way in your notebook and in discussion that was forced by intimidation or authority?
- 8.Do you know of anyone that felt that way?
- 9.What was the main benefit to participants of being involved in the Visioning process?
- 10.Do you feel like there were any effects of the Visioning process that were unintended? Please describe.
- 11.Do you feel as though there was a change in the frequency or number of citizens contacting you at your job from before to after the Visioning process?
- 12.Have you noticed any changes in the way or frequency with which people are interacting with the Town since the Visioning process ended? Please describe.
- 13.Did you learn anything at the Visioning sessions?
- 14.Did you learn anything about how local government functions at the Visioning sessions?
- 15.What do you feel was the level of new knowledge transfer from the Town or consultant to participants during the Visioning process?
  - 1 =no new knowledge transfer
  - 2 =some new transfer knowledge
  - 3 =significant knowledge transfer

16. Do you feel the Visioning process informed people about how local government functions? (If explanation needed: For example, what happens at Council meetings, what kinds of decisions are made at Council, what kinds of permits are needed for development, etc.) If yes, please describe.

17. Did the Visioning sessions change any choices or actions in your life? Describe.

18. Have you noticed other people's actions in relation to the Town have changed since the Visioning process finished? Describe

19. Do you think the Visioning process motivated people to become more involved with civic activities with the Town after the process was over? Describe.

<b>Interviewee position and name</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
Mayor, Rob Hutchins	June 29, 2009
Incumbent councillor, Duck Paterson	June 30, 2009 via phone
Two newly elected councillors, Bruce Whittington, Jillian Dashwood	June 29, 2009 and June 30, 2009
Two councillors from previous term, Jan Christenson, Rob Johnson	June 29, 2009 and July 13, 2009, via phone
City Manager, Ruth Malli	June 30, 2009
Planner, Lisa Brinkman	June 29, 2009
Manager of Administrative Services, Joanna Winter	June 30, 2009
Corporate Officer, Sandy Bowden	June 30, 2009
Corporate Services Co-ordinator, Rebecca Kalina	June 29, 2009

## Appendix 2: Interview Questions for Visioning consultant

What was the objective of the Visioning process?

Have you participated or learned of a process similar to the Visioning series before? Where were those undertaken? What were the similarities or differences?

How would you compare Ladysmith's Visioning process to other Visioning processes?

What was your role in the Visioning process?

5.What is your feedback from the Visioning process?

What is the feedback you have heard from citizens about the Visioning process?

6.How did you guide participants through the sessions – were you guiding them in a certain direction?

7.How was the process structured?

8. What was the main benefit to participants of being involved in the Visioning process?

9. Do you feel like there were any effects of the Visioning process that were unintended? Please describe.

10. What do you feel was the level of new knowledge transfer from the Town or consultant to participants during the Visioning process?

- 1 =no new knowledge transfer
- 2 =some new knowledge transfer
- 3 =significant knowledge transfer

11.Do you feel the Visioning process informed people about how local government functions? (If explanation needed: For example, what happens at Council meetings, what kinds of decisions are made at Council, what kinds of permits are needed for development, etc.) If yes, please describe.

Have you noticed other people's actions in relation to the Town have changed since the Visioning process finished? Describe

12. Do you think the Visioning process motivated people to become more involved with civic activities with the Town after the process was over? Describe.

13. How do you feel about the connection between public Visioning processes and civic engagement?

14.Do you have other upcoming related projects planned?

15.What have clients said to you about these types of processes in regards to their lasting civic engagement?

Consulting Facilitator, Report Author, Mark Holland	July 21, 2009, via phone
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