

## Last Word

## Sista Ordet



Bikes ...



buses ...



and pellets ...

### SUSTAINABILITY - SWEDISH STYLE - LESSONS LEARNED

#### Why Sweden?

Mamma Mia..., the country that gave us ABBA, the Nobel Peace Prize, Volvo, Ikea and the socially conscious clothier H&M is among the world leaders in sustainable development. A recent study by the Sustainable Society Foundation ranked Sweden #1 on the Sustainable Society Index in 2008.

So when a diverse group of "green-minded" Haligonians - people from Halifax, Nova Scotia Canada - were invited by Dr. Sofie Adolfsson Jörby to take part in a sustainability study tour of Sweden we jumped at the chance. Comprised of representatives from the private sector, Dalhousie University, Provincial and Municipal Government, and a Municipal Councillor, we visited a number of cities in southern Sweden including Malmö, Gothenburg, Växjö and Karlskrona.

#### What did we learn?

**Transportation** In Malmö, Sweden's most bike friendly city, we toured the award-winning Bo01 housing exposition site on special blue bikes owned by the municipality to engage employees in active transportation. We learned first hand that excellent mass transportation in all the cities made getting around a snap. The trams in Gothenburg were well utilized, plentiful, and traveled great distances quickly. Intercity train connections were convenient, frequent and on time. In Växjö, we discovered 46 percent of the population does not even own a car. Swedish cities prove mass transportation works.

**Smart Growth** We learned, like our hometown the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), many Swedish cities are grappling with how best to grow. We all strive for the ideal, liveable, city which balances envi-

ronmental, social, and economic sustainability. We all are cognizant of developing and maintaining neighbourhoods with the right mix of buildings, green space and social consciousness. Swedish cities adhere to guidelines recommending the placement and size of local parks. It is also interesting to note while Sweden's economy has grown by 48 per cent since 1990, its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have fallen by nine per cent. Conversely, between 1990 and 2005, Canada's economy grew by 51 per cent, while emissions grew by 22 per cent.

#### How is that possible?

We also learned Sweden's sustainability successes have not happened overnight. Collectively, the nation has worked long and hard to reduce its reliance on non-renewable fuel sources thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Green design and construction is paramount. Green roofs are the norm. LEED certification or better is sought for all new buildings. Well insulated, zero energy or passive houses are common. Those homes that do require additional heat typically draw from the local district energy plant that utilizes biomass. Wood chips or pellets from fast growing willow, renewably, supply these plants. Cars and transit run on biofuels. Individuals can log-on to the internet and track their energy consumption in real time. Apartment renters who utilize less energy than the average are eligible for a monthly rebate from the landlord.

**Autonomy for Municipal Government** We discovered one of the keys to Sweden's success rests with a tax structure that sees the bulk of personal income tax going directly to the municipalities. This gives tremendous autonomy to the individual municipalities permitting them to own and

operate their own district heating plants, generate wind power, develop solar houses or process organics. Another important success factor is Swedish politicians champion sustainability efforts regardless of their individual party affiliations.

**Similarities** The lessons learned in Sweden were so relevant as there are so many similarities between Nova Scotia and Sweden: climate, topography, industry, standard of living, natural resources, moving to knowledge based economy.

**What now?** The group returned home full of renewed hope and inspiration for the green future of Halifax Regional Municipality. Presentations are being made to key decision makers. Ideas and lessons learned are being shared with all those who will listen. It is imperative that the Halifax Regional Municipality continues to emulate the world leaders in sustainability and become accountable for the future of the region.

**Quotes** "The trip really was of mutual benefit. Many of the people your group met have thanked me for letting them meet such interesting and knowledgeable people, they also mentioned they learned a lot from you", Dr. Sofie Adolfsson Jörby, Environmental Coordinator, Boverket Swedish Housing Authority

"It seemed every single person we met with in Sweden emphasized the fundamentals of a green, liveable city being a balance of social, economic and environmental sustainability", Rebekah Cluett-Chan, Stantec Consulting.

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