RSI
RETHINK
SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

Where Economics and the Environment Meet

RSI Outlook: The Path Ahead

Winter Edition

February 2026

Opening Statement

This inaugural Membership Bulletin brings together highlights from across RSI's work and community. It is designed to keep members informed, connected, and engaged with the research, initiatives, and collaborations shaping RSI's contribution to sustainable development. Each edition will feature perspectives from RSI leadership, digestible updates on research and publications, and insights emerging from our Communities of Interest.

This bulletin also serves as a practical touchpoint for members interested in applying new methods, contributing to projects, or staying connected to RSI's growing network of practitioners, researchers, and partners. It offers a snapshot of the ideas, people, and initiatives supporting RSI's mission to engage with leaders, organizations, and communities to navigate uncertainty toward a flourishing and resilient future.

This first edition summarizes RSI activity from the past year; subsequent member bulletins will report on quarterly progress and new initiatives.

To learn more about membership and how to get involved, visit our website at rethinksustainability.ca/membership.

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Knowledge Exchange

RSI supports businesses, institutions, and communities in advancing sustainable development through evidence-based research and applied problem-solving. This work brings together academic insight, practitioner experience, and systems-level analysis to address complex economic, environment, and social challenges.

In this section of the bulletin, members will find concise updates on RSI's current and recently completed research projects, publications, and practical tools. These initiatives are intended to inform practice, support decision-making, and identify opportunities for collaboration.

01

Rethink 4 Walls (R4W): Unlocking new economic and social value from underused commercial spaces.

Led by Board Director Aiden Sweeny and Senior Board Advisor Tom Hawkett, Rethink 4 Walls (RW4) explores how underused office buildings can be converted into housing – from market units to supportive living – while reducing emissions, revitalizing communities, and upgrading stranded assets. The initiative examines adaptive reuse as a practical response to intersecting challenges in housing attainability, embodied carbon, and commercial real estate transition.

Current work with the City of Ottawa builds on lessons from the 230 Queen Street project to develop scalable models for office-to-housing conversion. This work is intended to support municipalities, asset owners, and developers in applying adaptive reuse strategies wherever similar conditions exist, across Canada and beyond.

Get Involved

If you're interested in adaptive reuse of commercial assets, whether to learn more or contribute to the development of office-to-housing solutions, contact Aiden Sweeny at aiden@rethinksustainability.ca and join RSI's Built Environment Community of Interest for direct engagement with project proponents and collaborators.

02

MacTier Rehabilitation: How can small rural communities recover from long-term economic and service pressures?

RSI is supporting the Township of Georgian Bay in planning the long-term rehabilitation of MacTier, Ontario. The project focuses on understanding the pressures facing the community, including declining economic activity, aging infrastructure, and challenges in maintaining essential services. Working with the University of Toronto's Risk Engineering Program, RSI is combining technical analysis with input from local stakeholders to identify current conditions, service gaps, and priorities for the community's future.

The goal of the project is to develop a practical rehabilitation plan that can be advanced with partners such as Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). The work is intended to serve as a broader example of how small rural communities experiencing long-term stress can plan for recovery, resilience, and sustainable development.

Stay connected

RSI members will receive updates as project findings and next steps are released.

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Township of Georgian Bay
- University of Toronto Risk Engineering Program
- Natural Resources Canada (NRCan)
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

03

Canada's Resource Value Chain Study: How can Canada capture more value from its natural resources?

RSI is leading a multi-year study to examine how Canada can capture greater economic, social, and environmental value from its natural resource sectors. The study explores opportunities to move beyond raw resource extraction toward higher levels of processing, manufacturing, and innovation—while ensuring environmental sustainability, economic resilience, and equitable distribution of benefits.

Working with industry partners, academic researchers, and government stakeholders, the study is building a practical framework to identify value chain bottlenecks, market opportunities, and policy interventions. The goal is to support decision-makers in understanding where and how Canada can strengthen its position in global resource markets while advancing sustainability objectives.

Phase one of the study focuses on understanding existing value chains in key sectors including forestry, mining, and energy. Phase two will explore opportunities for innovation, value addition, and strategic investment. The findings are intended to inform private sector decision-making, policy development, and collaborative approaches to resource development that align with Canada's climate and economic goals.

For more information

Members interested in contributing expertise or learning more about the study can contact RSI directly at info@rethinksustainability.ca

Communities of Interest: Connecting Knowledge to Action

RSI's Communities of Interest (COIs) are member-driven networks that bring together professionals, researchers, and organizations to collaborate on practical sustainability challenges and opportunities. Each COI creates a structured space for shared learning, discussion, and problem-solving – connecting evidence-based insights to real-world decisions and projects.

COI activity includes regular conversations (in-person and virtual), collaborative research and writing, and opportunities to shape RSI's priorities through member input. This approach helps ensure RSI's work reflects the practical needs of the people engaged in these issues, while also creating pathways for partnership-building and early-stage idea development. Together, the COIs support RSI's mission by turning collective expertise into informed outcomes that support practical action.

COI – The Built Environment

RSI's flagship COI examines the question: How should we build our cities and infrastructure, so they are prosperous, joyful, and resilient, as conditions change?

RSI's Built Environment Community of Interest brings together professionals and organizations involved in the planning, construction, management, and operation of buildings and infrastructure. Members include people from real estate, engineering, architecture, urban planning, construction, energy systems, and related fields who want to share insights and address shared challenges.

The COI provides a structured space for discussion, learning, and collaboration on topics such as carbon reduction, energy systems, material efficiency, resilience planning, and workforce development.

Members participate in regular discussions and events — both virtual and in person — and have access to applied research, expert perspectives, and a multidisciplinary network. Through these activities, the COI supports practical collaboration and helps members connect ideas with action across the built environment.

The Rethink 4 Walls (R4W) initiative currently operates under this COI, benefiting from member input on adaptive reuse, housing solutions, and community-centered redevelopment.

Build Canada Homes: Dare We Explore New Tools?R-

Written by Junichi Murahashi, RSI Director

Canada's housing affordability crisis cannot be solved within the boundaries of the current development framework.

RSI is challenging status quo. We believe affordable housing shouldn't have to rely on endless taxpayer subsidies or intensive regulatory micromanagement to be viable.

In February 2026, RSI will publish a provactive concept brief exploring a fundamental shift in affordable housing development: What if affordability was not something the government had to keep paying for, but something the housing system could fund itself?

Building on the objectives of the Build Canada Homes framework, we outline a model of self-funded affordable housing that aligns private capital, public policy, and the development industry around a shared outcome: profitable, long-term, professionally managed, affordable homes delivered at scale.

Canada already has all the right components. What has been missing is a structure that allows them to work together, one that unlocks stalled sites, mobilizes private-sector execution capacity, and preserves affordability over time without constant public intervention or growing taxpayer burden.

The full concept brief will be published in February 2026.

Follow us on LinkedIn for updates: linkedin.com/company/rethink-sustainability

Events

RSI's events bring together leaders, practitioners, and community members to explore emerging challenges, share insights, and advance collaborative solutions across our focus areas. From roundtables and workshops to public forums and partner-led sessions, these gatherings are a platform for exchanging knowledge and strengthening the networks that support meaningful change. Below is an overview of what has taken place over the past year.

Recap: The BIG SHIFT Series (2025)

In a year defined by rapid change, RSI's BIG SHIFT event series created space for leaders from across industries to examine the disruptions reshaping Canada's economic, environmental, and social systems. Through roundtable dialogue, expert insights, and collaborative problem-solving exercises, each event explored how organization can navigate uncertainty, accelerate innovation, and strengthen resilience. The following summaries highlight the key themes and takeaways from RSI's 2025 events.

Foundational Discovery Roundtable – February 18, 2025

Theme: Understanding the disruptions shaping Canada and exploring future-readiness pathways.
What it covered: This opening session established the foundation for the BIG SHIFT series. Participants examined major disruptions like geopolitics, international trade negotiations, climate change, AI development, cybersecurity, aging populations, declining innovation, and housing/food insecurity and how these forces shape Canada's economic and social trajectory.

The Built Environment & Stakeholder Communities – March 27, 2025

Theme: Transforming Canada's built environment through collaboration, innovation, and social impact. What it covered: This session focused on how disruptions like urban affordability, climate change, trade instability, technological advancement, and labor force capacity are transforming the built environment. Leaders explored how placemaking through stakeholder engagement, smart building design, and adaptive reuse strategies can help communities thrive and generate through-life value for asset developers/owners.

AI, Sustainability, and Constant Change – April 29, 2025

Theme: Trust, governance, and responsible innovation in the age of AI.
What it covered: The April session examined AI's dual role as a driver of productivity gains and a source of new, unconventional risk. Speakers explored the "good, bad, and ugly" of AI – from efficiency gains to ethical risks, misinformation, biases, and governance gaps within organizations. Trust emerged as the central requirement for responsible adoption of AI into business practice.

With Appreciation to Our BIG SHIFT Sponsors & Partners

The 2025 BIG SHIFT series was built on the collaborative support of our sponsors and partners. Their commitment allowed us to bring together leaders and practitioners to navigate the systemic disruptions shaping Canada's economic and social trajectory. We are grateful to the organizations for providing the foundation for these discussions as we look toward the 2026 horizon.

Collaborations & Partnerships

RSI actively builds partnerships that strengthen our mission and expand the reach of sustainable solutions across communities, industries, and sectors. These collaborations allow us to connect our members with leading organizations who share our commitment to systems-thinking, community wellbeing, and evidence-based approaches to sustainable development.

International Partnership: RSI x RSA

RSI is proud to announce our strategic partnership with the RSA (Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce). RSA is a London, UK-based global organization with a mission to "embolden enterprise, enlarge science, refine art, improve our manufacturers and extend our commerce." Our organizations share a deep alignment in mission and values – particularly in fostering resilient communities, supporting place-based innovation, and expanding equitable access to healthy environments.

This partnership creates new opportunities for knowledge exchange, joint programming, and member engagement across both networks.

Program Spotlight: Playful Green Planet

Playful Green Planet is an RSA initiative supporting communities in transforming underused green spaces into vibrant outdoor classrooms and nature-play environments for children aged 0-11. The program empowers schools, early childhood settings, and local groups to redesign their outdoor spaces in ways that strengthen child development, community wellbeing, and local nature recovery.

Although based in the UK, Playful Green Planet offers clear relevance for Canadian communities – particularly in relation to RSI's emerging Social Fabric Community of Interest, where issues of social cohesion, equitable access to green space, and community health are core concerns. The initiative provides a compelling model for reimagining neighborhood-level public spaces, and RSI will be exploring opportunities for shared learning and potential adaptation in a Canadian context.

Learn more about Playful Green Planet and explore how its network is advancing creativity, nature connection, and community-led change for enhanced early-childhood development.

Next Bulletin

Spring Edition

Expected Publication: April 2026

The next RSI Bulletin will be published in April 2026. It will feature updates on ongoing research projects, new initiatives, member activities, and upcoming events.

Contribute to the Next Edition

Members are encouraged to share updates, insights, or ideas for future bulletins. If you have a project, event, or perspective you'd like to highlight, please contact us.

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