

# Finding the Right Land Base to Create A Successful Intentional Rural Community (IRC)

[a concise guide with a not-so-concise title]

The key ingredient in any successful IRC is the quality of our members i.e. their integrated mix of skills, their material resources, and above all, their spiritual, emotional, and intellectual maturity. But even the greatest group of people will have a tough time succeeding if the land they bought isn't able to support their full range of needs. This guide was created to help groups carefully consider what characteristics to look for when buying rural land. Like its author, this guide is neither perfect nor complete but it will keep you from making any major mistakes if you read it carefully and use the checklist to help guide your buying decisions.

## The Key Things to Look For: *Land Capacity, Economics, Legal Regulations*

1. the land's capacity to nurture humans, animals, and plants, especially in terms of food, shelter, and energy
2. the purchase price, mortgage schedule, and number of members making mortgage payments
3. the restrictions placed on community-based enterprises and the availability of nearby jobs (as backups)
4. the zoning and other legal restrictions i.e. building codes, health regulations, etc. which will determine how many members can live on the land and what they can or cannot do in terms of activities

As you probably know the value of any real estate is based on three things; its location, where it's located, and of course it's physical presence in relationship to other things (location). Basically you have two choices when buying rural land for an IRC:

### Choice 1 *Buying land far from a major city:*

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  1. more affordable land prices means the ability to buy larger parcels of land that can support more members
  2. fewer zoning restrictions on population density means more members can live on the land
  3. more community members means mortgage payments are split among a larger group
  4. liberal interpretations / enforcements of building codes or health regulations means members can make use of composting toilets, straw bale buildings, gray water recycling, etc.
- 1. smaller number of work opportunities i.e. most local jobs are already taken by local people
  2. smaller number of advanced skills jobs means we may end up doing low-pay, less-skilled work
  3. greater isolation from our family members and non-community friends
  4. greater isolation from cultural activities that are found in towns and cities

## Choice 2 *Buying land near a major city:*

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- 1. greater number of work opportunities and advanced skills jobs means engineers do engineering, teachers teach, etc.
- 2. greater disposable income to build community resources e.g. meeting and common areas, better equipment, etc.
- 3. less isolation from family members and non-community friends because of greatly reduced traveling times
- 4. easier access to cultural activities found in larger towns and cities due to greatly reduced traveling times
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- 1. more expensive land means buying smaller parcels that can only support smaller numbers
- 2. greater zoning restrictions on population density means fewer members can officially live on the land
- 3. fewer community members means mortgage payments are split among a smaller group = higher individual payments
- 4. stricter interpretations / enforcements of building codes and health regulations limits alternative living approaches

To avoid the catch 22 of buying large, affordable parcels of land with little work opportunities ..versus.. buying smaller, more expensive land that limits our opportunities for growth as a community, I believe we must use a fresh, 21st century approach to creating successful IRCs. The approach I recommend is based on **Creating Successful Enterprises**. Here are two suggestions:

1. Along with our common vision and core beliefs, let's build our communities around a **central enterprise(s)** that the majority of members can and will participate in. Let's choose land based on its ability to **support our enterprise(s)**. Let's prepare our enterprise(s) **before** we buy land. The goal is to be able to "**work where we live**".
2. Those of us who don't participate in the community's central enterprise(s) can create our own enterprises, **make them portable**, and get them running on the IRC property. Examples include: online education / product sales / trading, small scale manufacturing, writing, etc.

When local zoning and other conditions enable us to work where we live, we can have the best of both worlds. We can enjoy the beauty and solitude of large parcels of truly rural land without having to resort to a primitive, hand-to-mouth existence.

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On the following pages you'll find a checklist you can use when inspecting and considering the purchase of a rural property. I recommend you print several copies of this guide and put them in plastic page protectors (it might be raining when you inspect potential IRC properties). Good luck in your land hunt. *Michael Greenstein*

# Rural Land Acquisition Checklist

Creating an Intentional Rural Community (IRC) in Canada

Category	IRC Requirements	Yes	No	How to Determine
<b>Location</b>	Within 30 min. drive of a large town offering work, fuel, groceries, supplies, emergency medical, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maps, tour the region in your vehicle, internet research, statistics
	Within 2–5 hour drive of a regional or international airport and / or city of 350,000 plus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Road maps, visit <a href="#">Transport Canada, 89 Designated Airports</a>
	Climate with enough sunshine hours and rain for happy community members and good crops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weather maps, visit <a href="#">Environment Canada, Canadian Climate Normals</a>
	Good year-round road / rail system	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Road maps, tour the region in your vehicle, ask neighbours
<b>Social Climate</b>	Friendly, non-hostile neighbours who share, accept, or tolerate the group's core values	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Attend local meetings, social gatherings, read local newspapers, listen to local radio, interact with people in area
<b>Affordability</b>	Price within actual or projected budget. Higher than budget price justified by higher potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Create IRC budget based on members \$ commitments and group enterprise projections
	Reasonable taxes and other local-regional costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get tax info at municipal or regional registry office
	Reasonable cost to bring in services i.e. hydro, wells, internet, sewage, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Quotations from utilities company, local contractors, ask neighbours
<b>Safety</b>	Natural or man-made protection against fire, landslides, flooding, etc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Look for cleared areas around building, water for firefighting, high-enough elevation above nearby high-water marks, hillside vegetation
	Local fire department, neighbourhood watch, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get info at municipal or regional office, ask neighbours
	Police available for emergencies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check with local, regional, or provincial police departments

<b>Water</b>	Presence of springs, streams, rivers, ponds, marshes, lakes, etc. that don't flood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Walk / dowse the property, get accurate map, ask neighbours,
	Proven year-round sources of good quality/quantity for community of "X" people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Walk / dowse the property, do a test drill, ask neighbours
	Proven year-round sources for gardens, greenhouses, fish ponds, animals, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Walk / dowse the property, do test drills, ask neighbours
	Proven seasonal sources for field crops and pasture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Visit <a href="#">Environment Canada, Canadian Climate Normals</a> , ask neighbours
<b>Legal</b>	Zoning for multiple houses and/or multiple families living in common dwellings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get zoning info at municipal or regional registry office
	Zoning for agriculture activities including different forms of animal husbandry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get zoning info at municipal or regional registry office
	Zoning for small scale manufacturing on property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get zoning info at municipal or regional registry office
	Zoning or tolerance for composting toilets, biological sewage management, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get zoning info at municipal or regional registry office
	Zoning or tolerance for alternative building structures e.g. straw bale	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get building info at municipal or regional registry office
	Building permits needed-enforced, engineering drawing needed for all structures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get building info at municipal or regional registry office
	Legal right to all minerals found on or underneath property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get zoning info at municipal or regional registry office
	Presence of right-of-ways owned by local gov't, utilities company, others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get property info at municipal or regional registry office
	Liens or encumbrances on property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get property info at municipal or regional registry office

<b>Food Production</b>	Good soil and growing locations for community gardening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check soil / weather maps, dig / test some soil, ask at local agr. office
	Good soil and growing locations for field crops and grazing pasture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check soil / weather maps, dig / test some soil, ask at local agr. office
	Min. 6 month outdoor growing season with adequate light, rain, and warmth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weather maps, visit <a href="#">Environment Canada, Canadian Climate Normals</a>
	Good sites for greenhouses, fishponds, corrals, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask people experienced in managing greenhouses, fishponds, etc.
<b>Shelter</b>	Existing structures that are immediately usable or can be with minimal renovation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inspection of structures by carpenters, renovators, or architects
	Suitable building sites for houses, barns, workshops, community spaces, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	List your probable structures, create a site plan, walk the property
	Local presence of timber, stone, straw, and other potential building materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Walk the entire property, check for local sawmills, brick and cement plants, quarries
	Services in place or available; electricity, sewage, etc. See <b>Legal</b> for zoning requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check with utilities company, registry office, contractors, neighbours
<b>Energy Production</b>	Suitable conditions for wind, water, and geothermal power generation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bring in specialists and do tests before undertaking any major projects
	Adequate solar radiation for photovoltaic, space and water heating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bring in specialists and do tests before undertaking any major projects, visit <a href="#">Environment Canada, Canadian Climate Normals</a>
	Access to electrical power grid, ability to sell excess electricity to utility company	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check with regional office of provincial utilities company

<b>Enterprises</b>	Good communication and transportation infrastructure for on-site enterprises	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Drive / inspect local roads / rail facilities, ensure good phone and Internet connections, ensure zoning allows for specific enterprises
	Available skilled workers in nearby communities for on-site enterprises	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check local newspapers, reg. employment offices, local bulletin boards
	Backup work opportunities in nearby communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check local newspapers, reg. employment offices, local bulletin boards
<b>Inspiration</b>	Special areas on property conducive to meditation and contemplation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	walk the entire property, camp out on the land for a few days
	Beautiful sunsets, change of seasons, clear night skies to view planets and stars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	walk the entire property, camp out on the land for a few days
	General atmosphere of peace and non-violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	walk the entire property, camp out on the land for a few days
	Presence of interesting wildlife, flowers, vegetation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	walk the entire property, camp out on the land for a few days
<b>Wholistic Health</b>	Excellent air quality; no odor-producing commercial operations upwind, none predicted in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	inspect local area by car and on foot, check with local registry office
	Low noise levels; no high-level noise-producing operations nearby, none predicted in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	inspect local area by car and on foot, camp out on the land
	No nearby sources of electromagnetic pollution; power lines, towers, etc., none predicted in future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	inspect local area by car and on foot, camp out on the land, check with local registry office
	Visual and aural privacy from neighbours and passing vehicles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	walk the entire property, camp out on the land for a few days

This ends the Rural Land Acquisition Checklist. I hope it proves useful to you. I would be very grateful if you could let me know if I've missed any important items. My e-mail address is found in the footer of this (and all) pages. Warm regards, *Michael*