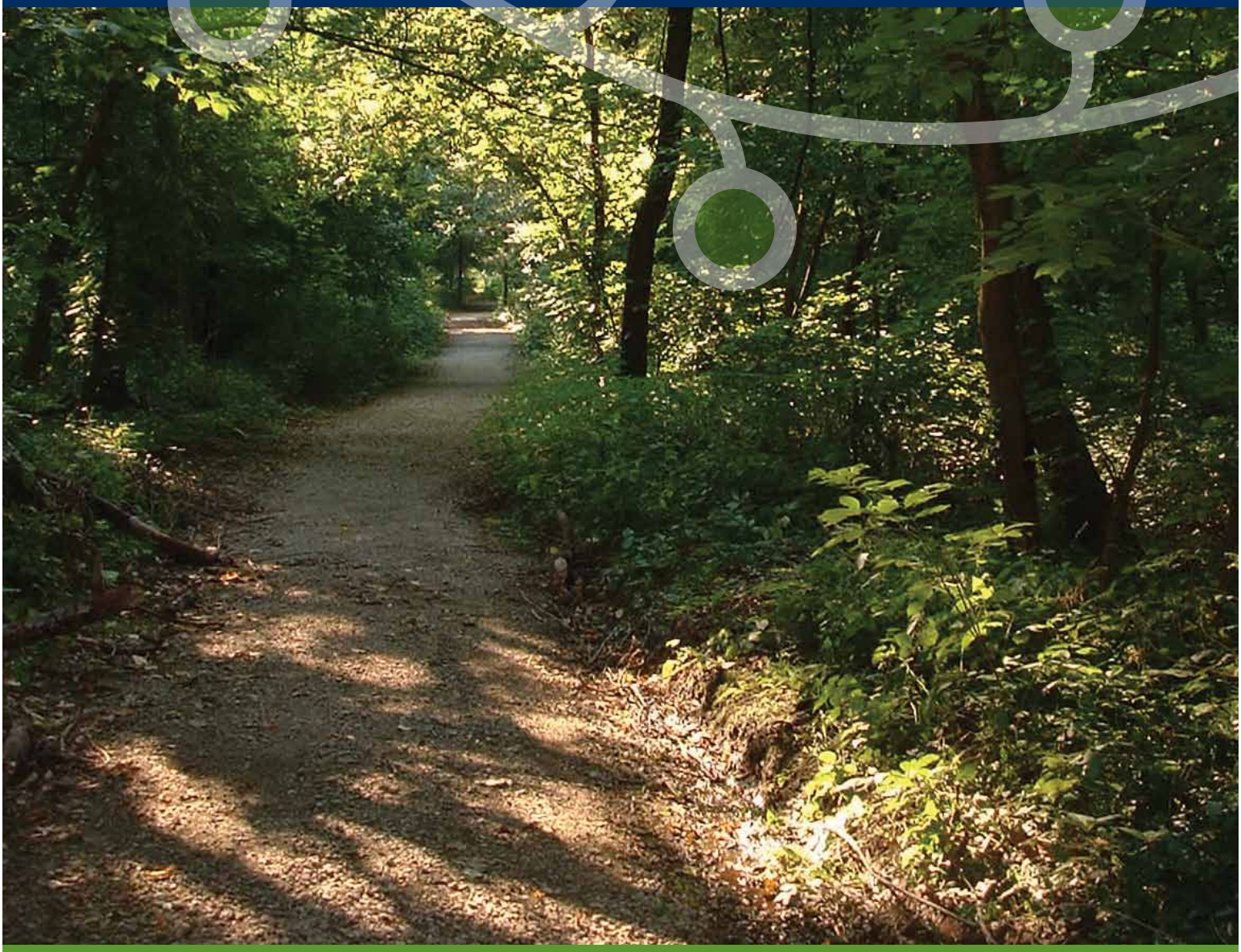
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY ROADMAP:

A TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

2009



FOCUS ST LOUIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustainability has become one of the leading buzzwords in the last decade. Being "green" is in these days. It seems nearly everyone is more aware of the threat of climate change. Some are examining energy alternatives to burning fossil fuels or nuclear power, while others desire to lower their dependence on foreign fuels and other increasingly expensive sources. A once small interest in alternative energy sources has become mainstream for these and other reasons. In addition, more and more citizens value recycling, realize the importance of clean water, and perhaps due in part to public health concerns, are willing to make sacrifices to achieve cleaner air. As a result, an increasing number of people are focused on preventing further harm to the environment and our communities. Indeed, a paradigm shift is taking place in how we live and act as a society, with a goal of leaving a better world for our children and grandchildren than we ourselves inherited. But what can we really do about it; and where does the responsibility lie to act on this seemingly overwhelming issue?

While the United States Federal government is taking a leadership role in sustainability initiatives, cities and counties across the country have also made the effort to make their communities more environmentally sustainable. Although policy debates typically take place at the national and international level, local governments are frequently on the front lines in the fight against increased emissions, poor solid waste decisions, and dirty air and water. They are taking the notion of "Think Globally, Act Locally" to heart.

What does this edict mean for the St. Louis region? How can our fragmented region, with hundreds of general purpose local governments in two states, transected by two major rivers, act locally to be effective in the fight against climate change? Some of our region's municipalities have a long history of incorporating environmental practices into their routines. Others have only recently integrated green practices into their processes or revised regulations requiring new buildings to be more sensitive to the environment and its resources. Many others have not yet considered what their role in environmental sustainability might be. But all can play a significant role in making progress towards environmental sustainability goals.

St. Louis faces serious region-wide environmental issues. In 2003, an additional 2,257 square miles were added to the St. Louis metropolitan area to reflect the incorporation of outlying areas. During the same period (between 2000 and 2005), however, population density in the region fell by 21 percent, illustrating continued land-use expansion without increased population growth. Not surprisingly then, in 2004 St. Louis ranked 6th in the number of freeway lane miles per square-mile of land at 1.9, behind only San Antonio, San Francisco, Baltimore, San Diego and Los Angeles.

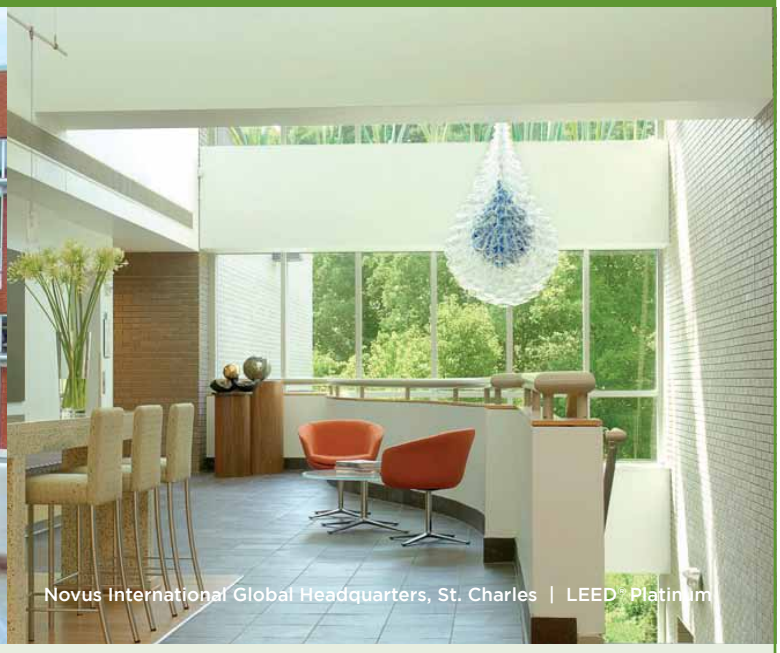
Cover Photo: St. Louis Forest Park Trail (Liz Forrestal)

> "There is a growing recognition that local governments can be ideal institutions to tackle environmental sustainability... [They] realize that an improved environment is a strong indicator of a healthy community and increases the desirability of a community."

While the region's air quality has steadily improved over the last 15 years, St. Louis still experienced an average of 13 days per year where ozone measurements exceeded the health-based standard for the time period reported, ranking sixth, tied with Cleveland. The St. Louis region in 2006 also ranked 5th worst in the country for asthma risk.

Consequently, according to the Environmental Resource Handbook, 3rd Edition (2005), the St. Louis metropolitan area ranks near the bottom of the Green Metro Index – 3rd worst (88th out of 90) behind Indianapolis and Detroit – which compares the nation's largest metropolitan areas on measures of environmental quality and performance with regard to air quality, toxic releases, Super Fund sites, energy use, mass transit use, and motor vehicle use. Some of these indicators, such as motor vehicle use, are a direct result of decisions made by local government. Energy use can also be associated with local ordinances and building codes. Other indicators, such as air quality and mass transit use, while local in nature, are indirectly related and would benefit from a regional planning approach.

St. Louis Community College, Wildwood | LEED® Gold
Photo: Jerry Seegers



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Development is sustainable "if it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

- Our Common Future, a report from the Brundtland Commission

In the past, one of the fundamental barriers to local action on sustainability was getting an issue that has traditionally been national or international in scope on the local agenda. There is a growing recognition that local governments can be ideal institutions to tackle environmental sustainability. Local governments adopt their own policies with respect to energy codes, land use decisions, residential and commercial regulations, transit options and solid waste disposal. A local official who has demonstrated concern for environmental issues can be an effective catalyst for change. Local governments can also be leaders in the community – and region – by acting in a more sustainable manner. This sets an example of government commitment and may also generate additional support for broader, community-based initiatives. It is often easier to change municipal policy internally before rolling out community-wide programs.

Fortunately, a growing number of local governments realize that an improved environment is a strong indicator of a healthy community and increases the desirability of a community. There is a long history of parkland, recreational amenities and public institutions like zoos and museums equating to a high quality of life. In more recent years, amenities such as light rail and bike trails have been associated with strong communities, and now, strong environmental initiatives are the marks of our most progressive areas. People are attracted to progressive neighborhoods.

Clearly, there is a need to improve the quality of the environment in the St. Louis region, and there's no better place to start than at the local level. Cultivating efforts at the local level – municipal or county – can lead to regional initiatives.

Michele Betsill, associate professor of political science at Colorado State University, has identified three barriers to local sustainability issues in her discussion paper *Localizing Local Climate Change: Controlling Greenhouse Gas Emissions in U.S. Cities*. These are the government's internal structure, staff availability to oversee new programs, and the availability of funds for environmental initiatives. This Roadmap has been created to address these challenges and bring the best practices, resources, recommendations and case studies together in a usable format to help local communities get easily onto the path towards environmental sustainability.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

According to *Our Common Future,* a report from the World Commission of Environment and Development (commonly referred to as the Brundtland Commission), development is sustainable "if it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Sustainability entered the mainstream with this definition in the Brundtland Report over 20 years ago, and it is the most commonly used definition for the term. Sustainability means the integration of environmental, economic, and social networks. It means enduring individual well-being and satisfaction. It means living completely within nature's limits, with a prosperous economy, in healthy communities, with a high quality of life for all citizens. Indeed, the term sustainable can be given a stable and useful meaning only by building it into a comprehensive theory of environmental management. Sustainability is about making choices that nourish and prolong the individual, the community and the ecosystem.

THE FIVE STEP PROCESS

"The very goal of sustainable living is a moving, changing target, to be defined as part of a process and refined as more experience pours in"

These are the words of eminent scholars and ecologists, C.S. Holling and Lance Gunderson, in their book *Panarchy: Understanding Transformations in Human and Natural Systems* (2001). They underscore the importance of the "process" for all initiatives toward sustainability.

A PATH TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Each topic area in the following sections contains recommendations and implementation strategies for local municipalities and counties to undertake. The following process steps serve as a common pathway to move forward in all areas and gain the maximum benefit across issues:

1 Commit to Action

Committing to action starts the process of achieving sustainability, both in city operations and community-wide. Identify and empower a Sustainability Champion or committee to direct an overall sustainability program. Connect with local citizen-based initiatives. Consider modeling good practices in your own operations and facilities to serve as an example to the whole community.

2 Assess the Situation

Determine which environmental indicators your community will track and establish a baseline. Consider undertaking a greenhouse gas inventory along with other evaluations. A greenhouse gas inventory has the advantage of tieing many sustainable initiatives to a common metric. Other assessments can help focus priorities, such as open space assessments, transportation studies and others that are referenced in this Roadmap. This allows local governments to set measurable goals and track progress as implementation proceeds.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS ROADMAP

THE SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH IS ORGANIZED INTO FIVE TOPIC AREAS, INCLUDING:

1. Transportation and Land Use
2. Open Space
3. Stormwater
4. Energy and Water
5. Materials Procurement

EACH TOPIC IS ORGANIZED BY:

1. Summary
2. Recommendations
3. Implementation Strategies
4. Best Practices
5. Funding Opportunities

THE RECOMMENDATIONS HAVE BEEN GROUPED INTO THREE CATEGORIES:

Getting Started – these are start-up activities and actions that communities can address fairly easily and quickly and that will yield early results to promote further action.

On the Way – these are actions that will propel outcomes further into the community, take more effort and potentially require funding by the local government.

Sustaining – these actions promote long-term results that will have impact over many generations.

3 Make Plans

Strong plans addressing the many different environmental indicators in the community integrate a number of different elements dynamically, and evolve over time to anticipate and respond to changing conditions. Informed long-range goals and practical, achievable interim goals are the key to long-term success for all sustainability programs.

STEP 3

5 Measure and Celebrate Success

Monitor performance to track success. Measurable success helps to achieve long-term goals and maintain momentum. It also makes it possible to refine policies and programs by learning what works and what does not. Continual measurement allows you to promote success while creating opportunities to highlight the cumulative impact of many actions.

STEP 5

4 Implement

Along with a thorough planning process, careful implementation is essential to successful sustainability initiatives. Launch new initiatives quickly, so the community can get a big boost with "quick wins" – actions that can be implemented within a few months, have low capital costs, and promise benefits that will become apparent within a year.

STEP 4

TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE SUMMARY

Transportation and Land Use are key elements in planning for communities. Transportation decisions include the location and design of streets, sidewalks and parking, as well as the design of lanes, paths and parking facilities for bicycles. Land use refers to the types of buildings and uses that are associated with a particular parcel of land—such as residential, commercial or agricultural. Municipalities use zoning to influence the land use decisions of individuals and developers.

The transportation and land use decisions made by municipalities have a major impact on environmental quality. Many changes can be implemented at fairly low cost, and in fairly short time periods. But major change in transportation systems and land use patterns can take years, or even decades, to create. It requires a long-term commitment to fully integrate sustainability concepts into land use and transportation decisions. Leadership in this area requires a willingness to think not only about short-term benefits, but also about implications for future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Getting Started

- Assess the walk/bike friendliness of the community using readily available assessment tools. For example, a community can apply for a Bicycle Friendly Community designation from the League of American Bicyclists and learn through that process where improvements are needed.
- Review existing standards, design guidelines and land use policies in the community for conformity with Complete Streets principles.
- Enroll in Metro's Partial Expense Reduction for Commuters (PERC) program to encourage city employees to use mass transit.
- Engage the police department in enforcing and educating the public about bicycle safety laws.
- Provide professional development for staff regarding best practices.
- Provide preferential parking for carpoolers, hybrid car users and those driving vehicles with better fuel efficiency.
- Provide free parking for employees who ride-share.
- Subsidize bus and light rail fees for city staff.
- Initiate a car/van-pool program.
- Encourage parking at remote Park and Ride Lots.
- Allow fleet vehicles to be used for employee carpools.
- Encourage enrollment in RideFinders and other regional carpooling programs.
- Encourage community-car options.
- Provide shower facilities and lockers at work for those who walk or bike to work in summer months.
- Create a monthly incentive program for bikers and walkers within a larger overall employee wellness program.
- Create awareness campaigns to highlight the availability of alternative transportation options – bus routes and times, availability of bike routes and bike racks, etc.
- Create additional bike trails and bike-only lanes on roads.

On the Way

- Adopt a Complete Streets ordinance encouraging city staff to consider the needs of pedestrians, bikers and the disabled in planning and engineering.
- Incorporate Complete Streets principles in comprehensive plan updates.
- Revise zoning ordinances to allow dense and mixed-use communities. Encourage parking lots in the rear of buildings or in concentrated parking garages.
- Consider the needs of pedestrians and cyclists in neighborhood, subarea and corridor plans.
- Update local street design guidelines and standards with a focus on encouraging non-motorized travel. Use traffic calming measures such as curb bump-outs and raised intersections.
- Adopt streetscape requirements, including landscaping and lighting, to create pleasant, human-scale environments.
- Consider alternatives to widening streets in order to deal with congestion.
- Encourage employers to provide bike parking, showers and lockers for non-motorized commuters.
- Develop an off-road network of greenways and trails, as well as an on-road network of bicycle facilities.
- Convert part of city car fleet to other modes (e.g., bikes and horses for the police department).

Sustaining

- Enforce commitment to walkable communities through permitting processes. Hold developers to local standards, with variances only in extenuating circumstances.
- Use redevelopment sites as opportunities for dense, walkable, and mixed-use communities.
- Target compact growth in existing centers and along existing corridors.
- Allocate transportation funds in a way that reflects the desired mode split.
- Initiate or enhance a public campaign to support transit.
- Work with regional, state and federal elected officials to create opportunities for transit oriented development.
- Work with neighboring cities, East West Gateway Council of Governments, and Great Rivers Greenway District to ensure a seamless, connected, and safe transportation network for bicycles and pedestrians.

OPEN SPACE SUMMARY

Open Space is immediately and ultimately impacted by the decisions and activities in each community. Consequently, it plays an integral role in all aspects of sustainability planning. Open Space areas are found in urban, suburban, and rural locations. They can be designated areas of land or water or zoning districts (or overlays) where development is controlled to create undeveloped areas of land or water within a community or region. Open Space areas are commonly open to the public; however some can be owned by non-profit or private interests.

The purpose of Open Space is the:

- Indefinite preservation or conservation of a community or region's natural character.
- Conservation or preservation of a land or water area for recreational, ecological, environmental, aesthetic or agricultural interests.
- Management of a community or region's growth in terms of development, industry, or natural resources extraction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Getting Started

- Switch to using organic, chemical-free compounds on Open Space.
- Begin a campaign to eradicate invasive and non-native plant species.
- Track costs of watering and fertilizing non-native plants.
- Review maintenance practices of parks and other public facilities for sustainable practices.
- Review zoning ordinances and building codes to determine if Open Space is addressed.
- Conduct a six-month review (and 12-month review) and report the results and progress to elected officials and the community.
- Begin public education and outreach activities on the importance of Open Space.

On the Way

- Promote and organize a community Green Practices Committee to monitor invasive and non-native plant species. Other public participation programs are Adopt-a-Trail, Community Garden, Track Bird Migration, and stream/trail cleanup events.
- Conduct an Open Space assessment.
- Work with city planners, developers and biologists to develop mixed-used communities.
- Restore brownfields, creating greenspace for public use.
- Conduct project review(s) and report to community.
- Prioritize possible best practices for updating zoning and comprehensive plans to achieve quality Open Space.

Sustaining

- Create open networks throughout a community that serve a dual function, such as providing greenways for pedestrians with rain gardens for management of stormwater runoff.
- Customize assessment tool and update assessment on a regular basis to compare baseline over time.
- Review your mandate to assure protection and maintenance of trees on public property and rights-of-way.
- Plant additional trees to enhance the urban tree canopy.
- Identify and protect natural resource areas (e.g., forests, prairies) and critical habitat (e.g., conservation corridors, buffer zones, wildlife preserves) from future development.
- Identify and protect critical areas such as wetlands, floodplains, lakes, rivers, and streams with a mandatory no-development buffer.
- Identify and protect source water areas from current or potential sources of contamination.
- Identify and preserve trees on private property and require replacement when removed or damaged during development.
- Update zoning and comprehensive plans to achieve high quality Open Space.
- Leverage existing capital funds to plant more street trees and add multiple benefits to the public right-of-way.

STORMWATER SUMMARY

Stormwater runoff is generated when precipitation from rain and snowmelt flows over land or impervious surfaces and does not percolate into the ground. As the runoff flows over the paved streets, parking lots, and building rooftops it accumulates debris, chemicals, sediment or other pollutants. This adversely affects water quality if the runoff is left untreated and subsequently discharged into the sewer system. Increased stormwater also carves away stream banks and incised stream channels and damages roads, bridges, homes, and yards. As urban development with impervious areas and concrete culverts increases, polluted stormwater runs into urban streams and decreases the diversity and quality of aquatic life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Getting Started

- Incorporate stormwater plan comments and review into the early stages of development review or site plan review and approval, preferably at pre-application meetings with developers.
- Provide signage for creeks on all major roadways indicating that the creek is used to manage stormwater.
- Conduct a stormwater event in which people learn where the stormwater from their roof goes and the extent and variety of pollutants it picks up along the way.
- Establish demonstration projects for rain gardens and use of rain barrels.
- Develop public education and outreach campaigns, such as bill inserts, public service announcements and local web sites.
- Educate the community about sources that contribute to stormwater pollution: using excessive fertilizer and pesticides, improper disposal of pet waste, and placing yard waste in streams and stormwater inlets.
- Control construction site runoff.
- Control post-construction runoff.
- Prevent pollution and conduct good housekeeping in municipal operations.

On the Way

- Develop vegetated swale(s) in appropriate locations.
- Plan and implement effective riparian buffers.
- Protect undeveloped riparian zones from construction.
- Remediate damage to creek banks.
- Reduce requirements for parking and encourage or require commercial parking lots to be permeable.
- Revise development regulations to require on-site management of all stormwater.

Sustaining

- Replace conventional roofs with green roofs, providing better stormwater management and reduced energy consumption of buildings in dense urban environments or with large roof expanses.
- Acquire intelligent pump control software to manage unpredictable stormwater flows, reducing overflows and the negative impacts of combined sewers on wastewater treatment plants.
- Include narrow streets or minimum possible roadway requirements in ordinances, providing safe passage for pedestrians, cyclists, strollers, and wheelchairs.
- Eliminate possible Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO) and Sanitary System Overflows (SSO).
- Protect natural resources and open space.
- Detect and eliminate illicit discharges.
- Design complete, smart streets that reduce imperviousness.
- Promote efficient, compact developments and infill.

ENERGY AND WATER SUMMARY

Energy and water are essential natural resources on which modern life depends. Most municipalities will want to make conserving them core sustainability practices. Although the use of these natural resources is deeply woven into the fabric of modern life, standard practice has historically been very wasteful of both, and thus, significant opportunities for improvement exist.

Energy use in the community is usually analyzed into the following sectors: transportation, commercial, residential, and industrial. The relative importance of each sector varies from community to community. Because the importance of these sectors varies, it will be essential for each municipality to understand the energy use of its own governmental operations and community.

Any sustainability plan must incorporate methods to save energy and money by reducing usage in and around buildings. Research has shown that better lighting and proper heating and cooling design results in greater comfort and higher productivity of occupants. Missouri and Illinois are in Climate Zone 4 of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) climate map, featuring mixed and humid variable weather. This climatic challenge requires energy and water cost reduction solutions specific to this energy-intensive region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Getting Started

- Work with a consultant to do an energy and water use audit. You may even be able to arrange financing based on your energy and water.
- Develop energy and water saving procedures to share with city employees (via employee newsletters, intranet, etc.) and residents (via inserts in tax bills, etc.).
- Implement simple steps towards saving money and energy on lighting, such as adopting a “lights out” policy in unoccupied rooms and replacing inefficient lamps and bulbs with more efficient ones. Don’t forget to address out-of-the way lighting in city parks, parking lots and parking garages.
- Purchase energy efficient electronics and appliances, including vending machines and water heaters. Look for the ENERGY STAR label.
- Provide regular maintenance and tune ups to building systems (e.g., water heating, HVAC) to identify energy and water waste issues (e.g., leaky faucets or dirty air filters).
- Install programmable thermostats and motion sensors to reduce HVAC and lighting to buildings and rooms when they are unused.
- Encourage weatherization projects, which can be as simple as re-caulking windows and doors, tightening up or sealing ductwork, and insulation upgrades.
- Replace inefficient water fixtures, faucets and landscaping.

On the Way

- Hire an energy and water manager to track energy and water usage and implement savings, or assign this to a sustainability coordinator/manager.
- Pass an ordinance requiring that city owned and funded new construction achieve certification of LEED Silver level or better.
- Pass and enforce an ordinance requiring new residences and retrofits to meet the current International Energy Conservation Code, supported by the U.S. Department of Energy. (IECC 2009)
- Pass and enforce an ordinance requiring new commercial buildings and retrofits to meet the current ASHRAE Standard 90.1 or better. (ASHRAE Standard 90.1-2007)
- Replace all traffic lights and exit signs with LEDs (light-emitting diodes).

On the Way(Cont):

- Remove barriers to green building, energy efficiency and water efficiency in existing building codes (e.g., allow private development to use waterless urinals if they choose).
- Undertake a comprehensive lighting study and implement actions from the study, such as installing motion detectors in rooms and replacing inefficient street lamps and bulbs with more efficient technology.
- Install reflective roofing or green roofs on city buildings.
- Include regulations for saving energy and water in the job description of all new hires. Require new hires to be familiar with energy and water saving strategies relevant to the position for which they are hired.
- Purchase renewable energy credits to support cost-effective renewable energy projects.
- Develop and run an education campaign about water and energy efficiency for residents, businesses and institutions.
- Reduce water used in grounds maintenance by installing efficient sprinkler systems (drip irrigation), choosing native plant species and sighting vegetation appropriately.
- Install low flush and low flow fixtures when replacing plumbing.

Sustaining

- Strive for carbon-neutral or net-zero energy buildings by 2030.
- Amend Zoning and Subdivision ordiances to increase the reflectivity of sidewalks and pavements in order to reduce urban heat island effect.
- Generate energy on-site from renewable sources (e.g., geothermal, photovoltaic solar panels, solar water heating, wind, methane recovery, or biomass).
- Encourage energy and water efficient strategies in new and existing commercial and residential buildings through laws and incentives.
- Collect rain to water gardens and lawns.
- Reuse graywater for non-potable water needs.
- Provide on-site wastewater treatment and infiltration.

MATERIALS PROCUREMENT SUMMARY

"Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" the 3-R motto of sustainability, is at the heart of sustainable materials procurement. Does a material need to be used? Can it be reused? Can it be recycled? All of these questions should be asked up front.

But there is more to it than this. Energy to produce, transport, and dispose of materials, the effect of the materials themselves on the environment, and the effect on human health while in use and when discarded, are at the very core of this sustainability analysis. Moreover, it is one of the easiest topics to address by local governments because of the availability of ever-advancing information and wide-spread main street support. The issue is readily understandable to local government officials and citizens, and it is one area in which local government has exclusive control.

The primary approach to materials sustainability is to use an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) policy. EPP calls for procuring goods that do not sacrifice performance or price, while at the same time reduces the environmental impact associated with their manufacturing, use and/or disposal. Embedded in EPP is the concept that every tangible product has an impact and must ultimately be analyzed through an EPP policy model. This includes every product—office equipment, choice of paper (recycled versus non-recycled), copying and printing policies, cleaning supplies, vending machines, light bulbs, furnace filters, and construction materials—as well as the government's fleet needs, including cars, trucks, fire equipment and the fuel products themselves. EPP involves virtually every aspect of the management of local government operations, and it all begins with decisions regarding procurement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Getting Started

- Form an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) committee comprising representatives from the city departments that procure materials.
- Evaluate and assess what materials are being used by the local government and its various departments.
- Establish an EPP program based on these findings.
- Educate city employees about the EPP program.
- Encourage the 3Rs—Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

On the Way

- Audit, assess and create a complete listing of materials used by all departments.
- Develop a formal EPP policy.
- Research possible Green Purchasing Organizations to assist the Committee in performing an analysis of products used or under consideration for use.
- Consult with similar municipalities for information that may already have been analyzed.

Sustaining

- Continue to educate city employees about the EPP policy.
- Update EPP policy as necessary.
- Continue to implement the EPP policy in all government operations.
- Update resources as technology advances.

FOCUS St. Louis extends appreciation to the individuals who served on the Environmental Sustainability Task Force and the guest speakers who provided their insights. A special thank you to the co-chairs who provided much guidance, insight, energy, and support to this project.

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for their graphic design assistance.

FOCUS St. Louis works to develop leadership, influence policy, and promote community connections throughout the bi-state St. Louis region. The mission of FOCUS St. Louis is to create a thriving, cooperative region by engaging citizens to participate in active leadership roles and to influence positive community change. A nonpartisan 501(c)(3), FOCUS St. Louis has four key priorities for the 16-county area: good governance, racial equality and social justice, quality educational opportunities, and sustainable infrastructure.

FOCUS St. Louis will advocate on behalf of the environmental sustainability recommendations made in this report. FOCUS will also work to ensure that the recommendations in this report are being implemented and that progress is being made by local communities. As the quality and content of best practice resources changes rapidly, FOCUS will continue to provide updates to these and other resources via the FOCUS St. Louis Web site for use by local government officials and residents.

If you would like to do more to help your local community become more environmentally sustainable, or if you would like to share a success story from your community, contact John Wagner at 314-622-1250 x105 or john.wagner@focus-stl.org. To download copies of this executive summary, the full report, and the toolkit please visit http://www.focus-stl.org.

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