

# Sustainability Strategy

Sustainability Super Team  
Report to City Council  
December 19, 2006

---

Below represents the Sustainability Super Team's (SST's) work over the course of eight months. The Council's vision of sustainability and goal statement is the inspiration for this work.

City Council wants to see sustainability put to action. This Sustainability Strategy is a reflection of Council's stated urgency, and with Steve Hall's support to be flexible and creative, SST started marching forward to try some new things. This document is a work in progress and evolves as we learn more.

## OLYMPIA'S PHILOSOPHY

"The City's philosophy of sustainability is to consider how today's decisions will affect the quality-of-life for future generations. Think 20, 40, 100 years ahead, and beyond. The goal is to establish ways of living that can be sustained indefinitely."

*Comprehensive Plan for Olympia and the Olympia Growth Area, Page 2, July, 1994*

"A sustainable community is one that persists over generations and is farseeing enough, flexible enough, and wise enough to maintain its natural, economic, social and political support systems."

*Developed by the Sustainable City Task Force and adopted by the Olympia City Council March 16, 2003.*

## GOAL

Put sustainability to action so that we save our planet.

*City Council, January 2005*

## CHALLENGES

From our perspective as Directors, we discussed the climate of the organization and what it will take to fulfill Council's goal. We concluded that there are three barriers to putting sustainability to action.

- **Clarity of what sustainability is**

Many exchange the words "sustainability" and "environment" as if they are the same. If sustainability is about ways of living and quality-of-life, then

---

sustainability must incorporate other factors. This begs the question; does the entire Comprehensive Plan really articulate our vision for sustainability? The problem is that we all may be aiming for a different target. *What do we mean when we say sustainability?*

- **Bringing sustainability down to earth**

Sustainability is a concept that challenges people to think big picture and long-term which makes it hard to translate into tangible day-to-day actions. It is therefore easy to ignore it because sustainability doesn't apply to the job, or to resist it because it makes the job harder. We must overcome these perceptions. *How can sustainability be part of the job and make the job easier all at the same time?*

- **Finding the Complete Solution**

A well known syndicated columnist once said, "There are no right answers, only important choices." In City government, this couldn't be truer. Both staff and Council wrangle over policy decisions where economics, service level, process, and the environment are all at play. There are also trade-offs between different program areas that may not be known or openly discussed. *How can City Council and staff reconcile these seemingly competing forces towards a balanced solution?*

## **CITY GOVERNMENT AS THE CONDUCTOR**

Why should City Council and staff invest so much energy into sustainability?

Because there is not an agency or group that has more access to tools that impact community sustainability than City Government. Sustainability is so important and so serious that it would be irresponsible of the City not to address it. Here is a sampling of some of the City's unique tools.

- **Unified leadership.** The City Council and City Manager have the authority and direct control over the foundations of a healthy community. From public safety, utilities, transportation, and planning to community enrichment, the City Council is the common thread that ties all of these key elements together. The City's mission becomes sustainability.
- **Focal point for community discussion.** A sustainable community relies on an active citizenry who is motivated to come together and do their part. Olympia is lucky to have this. The City Council and staff carry a visible role to better tap this powerful resource.

- **The land connects us.** Our values, relationships, and needs all originate from a sense of place and belonging. Whether you live or work here, what ties us all together is our connection to the land. Our challenge is to better adapt our culture to our landscape so that we inhabit Olympia well. Our political boundaries become natural boundaries that give us a manageable frame to work within.

## PURSUIITS

Recognizing the City's leadership role and the challenges that lay ahead, SST created the following action plan to achieve our vision of sustainability.

### 1. Sustainable Economy Chapter

*Deliverable: Prioritized Sustainable Economy Chapter with tangible next steps by second quarter, 2006*

The Sustainable Economy Chapter has 11 goals and 90 stated policies. With so many priorities, what can we do that shows progress? SST started by finding a way to help the City decide what is most important, and where to focus limited resources. SST is using the Sustainable Economy chapter to "pilot test" a process for determining how to "operationalize" broad goals in the Comprehensive Plan. The idea is to help the Council set priorities by seeking out high value efforts that we can achieve realistically with available resources. This is just the first step.

### 2. Decision-Making

*Deliverable: Apply the Sustainable Action Map (SAM) to a few current policy choices before City Council and evaluate the tool's effectiveness at making sustainable choices by fourth quarter, 2006. One project is the AFSCME Labor Agreement*

Sustainable action starts with sustainable decision-making. To accomplish this, SST believes that the City should use a model that will help all staff think through policy decisions and incorporate all aspects of sustainability in solutions. A successful decision model:

- Will help identify balanced solutions.
- Will help decision-makers see the trade-offs and opportunities, not just pros and cons.
- Will be simple and user-friendly.

- Will tell a story, be visual and easy for the average citizen to understand, and see the connections between seemingly unrelated things.
- Will be able to be replicated in any City Department.

The SST hired sustainability expert Lee Hatcher from Atkisson Associates, who shared some different sustainability models. SST liked The Compass Model for its balance and ease of understanding. The Compass includes four spheres of influence for sustainability: (N)atural, (S)ocial, (E)conomic, and (W)ell-being. The Compass Model inspired STARS to create a descriptive decision tool called the Sustainable Action Map (SAM).

### **3. Indicators**

*Deliverable: Identify sustainability indicators for the Olympia Community by fourth quarter, 2006*

In 1996, the City started publishing sustainability indicators in the biennial State of the City Report. The purpose was to measure progress towards becoming a more sustainable city. Where possible, the report tried to incorporate the indicators used by the Sustainable Roundtable of the South Sound, but mainly focused on areas and services that the City itself offers or has some control over.

Indicators that were reported on population, housing, land use, the economy, parks and open spaces, water resources, transportation, air quality, energy, solid waste, public safety and health, and public participation. The report was published three times, with the last published in May 2003. It was cut from the budget.

City Council provided funding to the Sustainability Community Roundtable to publish sustainability indicators in 2006. The SST and roundtable will work together to shape these indicators. SST will be interested to see how these community indicators align with those in the State of the City Report and with our Key Result Measures as part of Tracking for Success.

### **4. Best Practices**

*Deliverable: Not defined yet*

The Department of Ecology (DOE) wants to help local governments assess how they are doing at being more sustainable. DOE recently invited the City to serve as a test city to try out a tool that will help evaluate sustainable

---

practices. SST will meet with DOE to define the scope and schedule for this project.

## **5. Employee Norms and Behaviors**

*Deliverable: Gather more information*

In partnership with the Evergreen State College, Public Works sponsored two sustainability interns in 2006. One project for the interns was to help engage employees around how to use SAM, and to do research around norms and behaviors necessary to be a sustainable city government. Some members of SST also attended a workshop on fostering sustainable behavior change in May 2006.

## **6. Reducing Energy Consumption and Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Working with Employees**

*Deliverable: List of best management practices that are high value/low effort in 2006/2007 to show quick wins, and lay out a plan for incorporating these practices by second quarter, 2006*

As stated above, Public Works sponsored two sustainability interns in 2006. A project for one of the interns was to do research focused on reducing emissions and energy use and formulating an action plan around best management practices. Another project was to identify possible grant opportunities for sustainable practices.

An important aspect of using these tools is establishing expected norms and behaviors.

## **7. Coordinating Sustainability Efforts**

*Deliverable: A plan for coordinating sustainability efforts by second quarter, 2006*

Public Works will identify a coordinator whose role will be to bring focus to sustainability efforts. The coordinator will also serve as a catalyst for future thinking around sustainability, will seek out grants, and will facilitate discussions with other Departments around sustainability priorities.

## **8. Seamless Service Delivery...Passing the Baton Smoothly**

**Deliverables:** CP&D/PW will prepare an After Action Report on what is working, what is not working, and what's next with regard to low impact development using Green Cove as our test project. The completion date for this report is fourth quarter, 2006

CP&D and PW recognize that the two Departments play a critical role in achieving City Council's Sustainability Goal by affecting the private and public development that is occurring, and affecting how resources are used and managed within the organization and community. CP&D and PW have established a Joint Leadership Team to improve intra-departmental coordination so that the land development process is more predictable and seamless. This team of key management personnel meets on a regular basis to develop a strategic plan and to monitor its implementation. Each Department is actively working to implement City Council's Sustainability Goal. CP&D through the effective administration of the community's land development regulations and Comprehensive Plan; and PW through its role in project management, resource protection, and infrastructure maintenance.

An emerging issue is the effectiveness of low-impact development and whether we are getting what we intended. We can now evaluate Cooper Crest and see how well it achieved the four spheres of SAM.