



MADISON COUNTY *Community Toolkit*

A Guide to Sustainable Living

*Developed by the
Madison County Council of Governments
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Introduction

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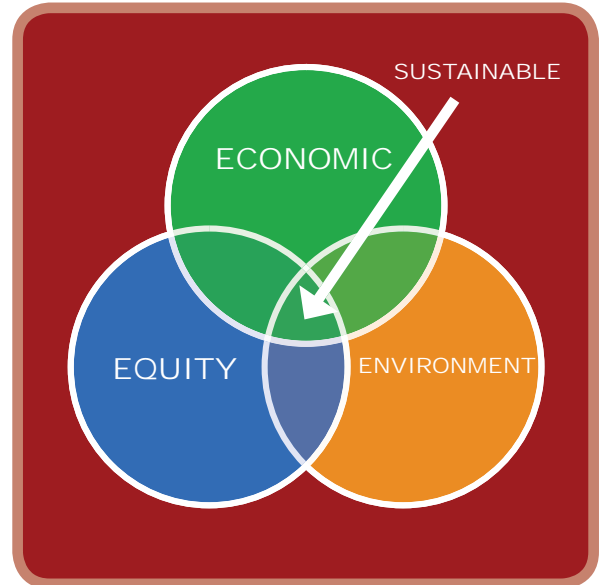
Introduction

Climate change, carbon footprint reduction and sustainability are becoming common place vocabulary terms in everyday life. These topics are being discussed among friends and coworkers, explored by television programming, and addressed as a major influence of many of our favorite products and companies as they compete to be the ‘greenest’. However, as common place and mainstream as the terms are becoming, the technology and core understanding of these ideas still remains elusive. As individuals, we are concerned about how our actions affect our bottom line as well as the environmental legacy we are leaving for future generations. But as individuals in a larger society, we understand very little about the collective role we play in incorporating these ideas into building communities.

Building healthy, vibrant and economically stable communities requires a lot of hard work; it requires making decisions that provide long term benefits that may not be popular in the short term and it requires residents to work together to create a unified vision – all of this comes one step at a time. Achieving a healthy, vibrant, sustainable community, will require a departure from the status quo and in some cases a comfort zone. It will require an understanding of how the choices we make at home affect our community, how by improving our own homes we bring value to our community, and how by working together we can create a community we are all happy to call our own.

Sustainability can be defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The underlying theme of this document is to translate sustainability terms into understandable terms, steps and cost. The intent is to help elected officials make informed decisions, and help citizens understand their role in shaping their community. A more complex definition of sustainability is tying together the concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems with the need for development while providing a social balance in a community. Thus, community sustainability is a balance of environmental, economic and equity systems.

This *Community Toolkit* is a compilation of resources that contains the primary concepts of sustainability as well as specific tools that are used to create sustainable communities. The *Toolkit* will provide an understanding of how the pieces and players fit together. It will provide easy access to information and processes for community-building skills and programs. The goal is to explore ideas and concepts, some from other communities, that are adding value to those communities and to connect people, elected officials and citizens, with these ideas, programs and resources in order to start thinking, and living, sustainably as a community.



Urban farming on a roof in San Francisco, ranked the second greenest city

Who should read this resource?

The intended audience and users of this toolkit include:

- Elected officials trying to shape and guide the development of their community.
- Organizations and public agencies providing community programs and support.
- Businesses wanting to invest in a community with a vision.
- Citizens trying to improve the quality of life in their community.
- Funders (government, foundations, and private) looking for community partners.

How is this document organized?

The *Toolkit* is divided into the three main sections of sustainability; environment, equity, and economic. Within the environment and equity are various topics pertaining to science, technology, community amenities and planning and development. Each of the topics is explained using a general definition as well as specific tools, steps, resources and examples. The economic section includes a cost evaluation of the topics found in the environment and the equity sections. The *Toolkit* is meant to read like a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of a website or an encyclopedia. Users may browse the table of contents or index to find topics that are of interest.

Maintaining healthy, vibrant and economically stable communities will require frequent adjustments and updates based on emerging technology, data and ideas. To be a relevant resource for community improvement, the *Toolkit* is structured based on the following philosophies:

- **Comprehensive:** The *Toolkit* needs to be up-to-date and all-inclusive. A single problem should have multiple 'tools' to help with the 'repair'.
- **Organized:** The *Toolkit* needs to be easily understandable, easy to find, and available on demand. The content must be useful, providing step-by-step guidance that the reader can apply directly in practice.
- **User-Friendly:** The *Toolkit* needs to provide assistance to users who may be unfamiliar with the subject matter or unsure of where to start.
- **Available:** The *Toolkit* needs to be readily available to users. Final editions should be made available on the internet and in easily reproducible and transportable pocket guides.
- **Longevity:** The *Toolkit* needs to build a solid foundation of learning and commitment to the community.
- **Collaborative:** The *Toolkit* needs to draw from multiple sources and build upon the expertise of the community. The elected officials and community residents should understand the concept of working together and learning from each other.

How to achieve a more sustainable community & home?

The fundamentals of a desirable community remain constant among a majority of residents. The fundamentals include safety, cleanness, individualism, acknowledgement of accomplishment, diversity of places to work, shop, play and residents, affordable cost of living, and stable economy. This *Toolkit* explores the processes of how achieving a sustainable community as well as finding your individual role in implementing the vision of your community.

Building a more sustainable community will require change. It will require a change in the way business is done, a change in the way communities think, a change in the way individual roles in society are viewed, etc. Change can be a difficult concept to understand, and people and institutions can often be opposed to it. This opposition is often caused by the fear of the unknown, a fear that things may not be better off after everything has changed, a fear of being exposed and exploited. These fears, while natural, often lead to stagnant communities and are often due to lack of information. This compilation of resources is intended to provide the information needed to expel the fears of the unknown.

A change towards a more sustainable future can be accomplished effectively through sound community planning and development policies. Community planning is a powerful way to improve communities. In order to improve communities, collaboration must be used to solve common problems in the most beneficial and financially reasonable way possible. In a healthy community,

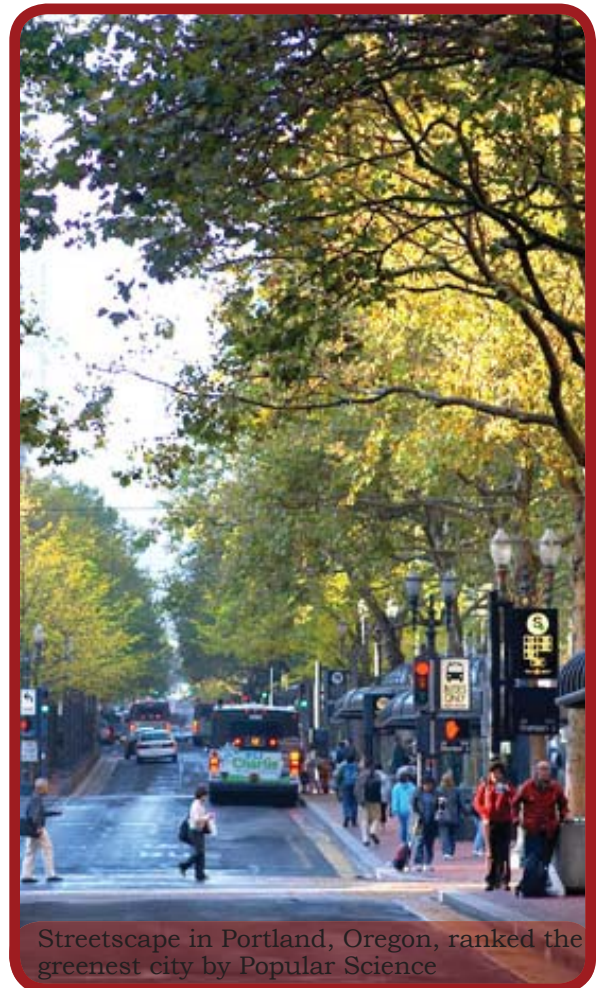
working together for the good of the community is a constant part of everyone's lives. Recognizing that our problems are connected to other issues, and people, helps reinforce the interconnectedness of the solutions and the community. Through this connectivity, a community can become a sustainable community, that is, a form of a living democracy: people working together to address common concerns. Citizens have a duty to shape the basic conditions that affect their lives along with others. As citizens work together to transform their community, the citizens will become bound by shared values and common purpose, further strengthening the community as a whole.

The basic components of sustainability are interrelated. They cannot be addressed separately to solve the same puzzle, but rather must focus on looking at the bigger picture and solving the issues holistically, with considerations for all of the other pieces of the puzzle. In order to achieve this sustainability, community planning first decides what needs to happen in the community and identifies issues that need to be addressed. These plans then guide community action and change. Often the plans are initiated by an evolution of technology that changes the function or operation of a known process. This symbiotic relationship is important to maintain and nurture to successfully respond to both technology evolution and planning efforts.

Community actions should be adapted to fit local conditions and supported through policy changes, public funding, or other means of institutionalization. As political reform and a shifting economy shape the tax base of our community, it is important to provide services in a more sustainable manner. A more complex definition of sustainability is tying together the concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems [environment] with the need for development [economic] while providing a social [equity] balance in a community. Thus, community sustainability is a balance of environmental, economic and equity systems.

What does a sustainable community look like?

- Communities that are balanced in environment, economic and equity by using these three systems to weigh decisions, policies and projects.
- Communities that provide access to a system of various modes of transportation (including bus, train, bicycling, vehicular, walking, etc.) and create healthier, more livable environments for their residents. Healthier employees are more productive at work, which also helps to generate cash flow. Active students are more attentive in class; active residents are more social within their neighborhoods, increasing a sense of community.
- Home owners retain storm water on site requiring less financial resources spent on infrastructure improvements which equals savings. The savings can be spent on other much needed capital improvement projects or programs.
- Communities that protect waterways and natural areas create amenities that attract residents, businesses, and visitors; which encourage employment opportunities and increasing population, therefore increasing the tax base. Visitors spend money while they are in the community, which generates cash flow.
- Communities that have robust recycling programs pay less in landfill tipping fees. The recyclable material can be used creatively by businesses to create value added products, thus promoting employment. The savings can be spent on other much needed capital improvement projects or programs.



Streetscape in Portland, Oregon, ranked the greenest city by Popular Science

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