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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

A primer for local government officials on what it means to be a sustainable community. This report is a collection of secondary research including a selection of approaches that can be undertaken to increase sustainability.

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Definition, Thresholds, & Intervention

The concept of sustainable communities is one in which improved quality of life, economic competitiveness, and environmental viability "drive a new way of living." Sustainability exists as a method through which these goals are realized and continuous development fostered. However, with the notion of enhanced communities come the unique and specific needs of those infrastructures and diverse community members. Sustainable mobility, efficient building construction, varied safety and security, and well-organized energy are just a few pivotal areas that need to be explored for communities to improve and achieve sustainability. Furthermore, executing the right practices economically remains crucial in attaining success. By beginning to implement techniques that endeavor to solve complex local issues, communities can begin to meet the demands of an ever-changing world and thrive suitably in the process.[1]

Sustainable communities are defined as "economically, environmentally, and socially healthy and resilient" populations within a given region that ultimately strive to preserve the needs of both present and future generations. Sustainability, the ability to thrive based on economic security and an improved quality of life, remains as a key principle in achieving these prosperous communities nationwide.[2] The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has determined that as part of a sustainable community being able to support itself, it requires the coordination of "federal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments to make neighborhoods more prosperous, allow people to live closer to jobs, save households time and money, and reduce pollution."[3] In response, federal collaborations such as the *Partnership for Sustainable Communities*, which includes the aforementioned HUD, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), have sought to establish programs which could increase the opportunities for a population to attain community-wide success. Furthermore, many efforts implemented, particularly on a local level, have also contributed to supporting regional sustainability. This, however, requires the presence of an informed and engaged citizenry as well as strong leadership. It is by these standards that joint federal agencies have established six "Livability Principles": transportation choices, housing, economic competitiveness, support of existing communities, coordination, and the value of communities and neighborhoods. These principles are used to better understand the notion of sustainability as well as to provide help to varying communities in discovering corresponding action plans that remain effective.

A crucial part in preserving a lasting sustainability involves what is called "multi-level governance." This consists of a complex interdependence, or relationship, among city, state, and federal agencies in enacting approaches that could work for the given area. Often times, governmental jurisdiction can overlap regarding the influence on policies.[4] For instance, Northeast Pennsylvania has an overabundance of local government entities. In the last decade, there have existed 28 government units for every 100,000 people in the region. This is in comparison to a much smaller national average. More specifically, Luzerne County alone is comprised of 76 municipalities, despite very small and/or shrinking populations in many of them. Due to inherent inefficiencies and the fragmentation of these local structures, many areas have therefore been challenged in providing vital services to their residents, or to develop economically in the long-term. It would be prudent to investigate opportunities for further consolidation or collaboration in order to improve sustainability. Furthermore, economic development would be strengthened through efficient joint planning among neighboring counties; addressing issues that often inevitably affect more than one region.[5]

Outside organizations, as well as the citizens themselves, may want to have a voice in regards to policymaking. Eric Zeemering from the Department of Public Policy at the University of

Maryland explains that there is actually a "diffusion," or dispersal, of policymaking decisions where responsibilities are shared between available central government agencies and "complex networks of public, private, and non-profit organizations." Zeemering also clarifies that in order for local administrators to be successful in enacting policies that support sustainable communities, they should rely on aspects of the multi-governance system; recognizing available resources and assistance from agencies. For instance, in relating it to environmental concerns, Zeemering states that local policy and city efforts are often times influenced, as well as greatly affected, by national legislation and policy reforms. Therefore, the national government has a strong role in otherwise "defining and implementing sustainability." Ultimately, it is the sharing of information between governmental actors and exchanges of strategy that create better sustainable community policies and enhanced initiatives for that particular city or locale.[6]

An initiative sponsored by the Boston Foundation entitled "The Boston Indicators Project" specifically seeks to evaluate shared civic goals that cities and municipalities could hope to accomplish in supporting development. These indicators, or markers, assist in pinpointing achievements as well as areas of needed improvement by relying on data, crucial research, and analysis. The project, with the City of Boston as a case study, specifically contains ten primary sectors relating to infrastructure with nearly 150 comprehensive indicators of evaluating sustainability in each. Indicator topics relating to development include the enhancement of "civic vitality;" or the connectedness and collaboration of the community as well as improved civil discourse as fostered by local leadership, "economy;" evaluating "levels of consumption, savings, and investment" in a localized area in order to determine that region's economic fairness and further sustainability, and "housing;" in which affordability and quality of housing options are analyzed alongside social and demographic characteristics so as to discover sustainable trends. Other indicators include the evaluation of a thriving cultural life and quality of the arts, the state of education in a given area, the efficiency of energy and its affect on the environment, and the progress of localized health systems, public safety, technology, and transportation infrastructures as provided for the public.[7] The standards by which all of these indicators are evaluated can help a community to better establish a satisfactory level of sustainable development, as well as allow administrators to continually track such growth. While the progression of various aspects of these indicators may vary based upon geographic location and population, they nonetheless can provide a basis by which local communities nationwide can improve in achieving sustainability.

A concern may arise in distinguishing guidelines as they pertain to rural communities versus those in more urban cores or large suburbs. Although it is important that strategic sustainability planning exist that is both well-coordinated and ultimately goal-driven, it is also crucial that procedures be employed that address the specific scope of the problem and remain cost-effective. In other words, resources must be used in a manner that most efficiently implements

the planned policy. This again advocates for a collaborative government system.[8] With rural communities in particular, there is a strong emphasis on the ability for "traditional main streets, agricultural and working lands, and natural resources" to endure. While rural communities may differ drastically based upon their size, the notion of the surrounding environment being integral to the subsistence of the region remains prevalent. Typically "rural" refers to small towns and small cities in addition to individual farming lands. These communities differ in comparison to larger cities that have their own set of unique development obstacles. The challenges of rural communities include the impact from changing commodity prices and land values, as well as technological advancements; all which can influence sustainability.[9]

While the problems are unique for different types of communities, similarly, so are the proposed solutions. Many have suggested that in order for these communities to maintain sustainability, they must revitalize transportation corridors and provide transportation options that offer increased accessibility between residential areas and job centers. Furthermore, rural regions that are typically comprised of housing that includes "single-family homes, townhouses, duplexes, and apartments" must be willing to address low-efficiency and aging structure concerns, in addition to finding new locations closer to business centers. While larger metropolitan areas may see a higher cost of living in comparison, small towns and rural communities must utilize the distinctive resources they possess, to an even greater extent, in order to achieve enhanced prosperity. The strategic application of federal investments, the impacts of which are felt more plainly by rural populations, can assist in providing sustainability. Finally, it is suggested that communities must be valued for their historical uniqueness. However, in the process, "adapting old structures for new purposes" will go a long way in creating economic strength and sustainability.[10] Regions such as Luzerne County, which possess a distinctive blend of both urban and rural characteristics, would be sensible in evaluating the appropriate solutions to address specific obstacles hindering current sustainability.

It is important to note the methods by which the resiliency of communities has transformed into tangible sustainability over the past two decades. This is done through examining the trends that have been documented in communities throughout a now more globalized world. It has been suggested, however, that there have been shifts in local mentality and policymaking; from a strategy of "thinking globally and acting locally" to one that is implemented more so to specifically address as well as remedy regional hardships. Communities are seemingly interested in constructing pragmatic solutions to address constantly adapting modern concerns; as has been witnessed through certain "social, economic, and individual transitions." Reflecting on sustainable communities, it has been emphasized that municipalities should never anticipate an "end state" of sustainability, but rather a continual resilience which administrators, local planners, and individuals can look to achieve. This progression forward would inevitably help to sustain proper levels of sustainability in various areas of municipal planning.[11]

Resilience, in regards to sustainable communities, refers to the individuals within those regions having the "ability to function in the face of change and shocks from the outside". As mentioned previously, while "outside" intervention may help to positively influence and guide local sustainable policy, it is the capability of communities to subsist despite drastic national or global changes that remains paramount. Such shocks range from short-term crises like natural disasters or the loss of a major employer to long-term challenges like structural economic changes. Indicators, and the particular community-supported action plans that are developed as a result, help to protect against such shocks. Stewart Barr and Patrick Devine-Wright note that such community-based initiatives are becoming more prevalent along with increased "consensus decision-making." Again, a pursued and collaborative vision on this level is needed in order for sustainability to be preserved.[12]

As noted previously, federal intervention is often required to aid in maintaining sustainability in addition to local strategies. Presently, despite possessing a somewhat more influential role by advising on various policies, several agencies have nonetheless created initiatives and formulated legislation to help in keeping communities prosperous. The primary federal bureau researching municipal growth is the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD promotes the idea that there is not a "one size fits all" model for lasting rural, urban, and suburban development. Instead, each community should seek to implement a "bottom-up approach"; responding to the greater, and often diverse, populations within a given region. Such an approach engages the citizenry in a way that is meaningful and allows community members to incorporate their "needs, assets, and visions" in planning for the future. This increased access to local leadership in attempting to achieve sustainability is otherwise known as "participatory development."[13]

Local officials and administrators should continually strive to maintain a focused vision that federal agencies could provide appropriate assistance in implementing. HUD, through its Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities and Sustainable Communities Resource Center, advises on local and regional strategies to better housing possibilities and promote localized innovation. More specifically, HUD assists in making comprehensive, yet integrated planning decisions that connect local communities and states with available sustainable resources in the transportation and green energy sectors.[14] The Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities has specifically formulated a "Sustainable Communities Initiative" to provide both regional planning grants and challenge-based grants to partnerships and government entities that are seeking long-term development and reform policies.[15]

The Department of Transportation also has a substantial role in promoting sustainability nationwide. For instance, in addition to funding, it advises communities as to the proper research and evaluation methods for determining the feasibility of various local planning

decisions.[16] Furthermore, the agency's "Livability Initiative" seeks to "enhance the economic and social well-being of all Americans" by providing accessible transportation options and various employment opportunities, as well as ultimately hoping to improve overall community health. This would partly require "increased public participation" and improved land use planning strategies.[17] The Environmental Protection Agency, similarly, has established building blocks which it believes could facilitate development and enhance quality of life for community members. The EPA's contribution to sustainable development involves technical approaches that are "action-oriented" for local communities and can advance policy plans. These are often accomplished through workshops provided by the agency for local administrators as well as audits of the various sustainable programs.[18]

As mentioned previously, the Obama administration in January 2009 commissioned a joint taskforce between these three agencies in order to advance livable communities. *The Partnership for Sustainable Communities* sought to combine the unique efforts of each organization's initiatives to provide a central, effective resource to guide regional entities. This requires using resources, namely taxpayer support, efficiently and in a manner that meets "economic, environmental, and community objectives". Such collaboration hopes to remove policy barriers at the federal level in order for communities to operate more successfully and in a timely manner.[19]

Livability Principles

The "livability principles" initiative, as established by the above partnership of the EPA, HUD, and DOT, has been called a "transformational" policy change and one that will increase intergovernmental cooperation.[20] Part of the effort to implement these principles would require, as highlighted, the intervention of federally funded programs and policies, and a vision for continued program implementation and auditing.[21] This combined endeavor would hopefully advance the sustainability of communities nationwide at a rate that is adequate for enhanced growth. Federal agencies, therefore, would look to award states that appropriately and efficiently utilize the provided funds in establishing sensible regional plans based upon the livability criteria.

The first principle addresses the policy area of transportation, with the overarching goal of "providing more transportation choices" to the community. The Department of Transportation has specifically developed this standard in the hopes of having communities implement programs that "decrease household transportation costs, reduce…dependence on oil, improve air quality and promote public health."[22] Elements of the federal government alongside local planning offices in Chicago published a report in 2009 reflecting on the implementation and intended objectives of the livability principles using Chicago as an example of an affected

municipality. The report, in regards to transportation, stated that generally the issue that most largely hindered sustainable transit involved the community's actual accessibility to various transportation choices. The topic of transportation, in this case, encompasses commuter transit on buses, trains, etc., as well as the fluidity of shipping and freight travel.[23]

The goal in advancing the effectiveness of these modes of travel and commerce involve creating choices that are economically efficient, physically safe, and socially dependable.[24] The 2009 report further advocates for equal division of federal funds to support and therefore increase subsistence in these transportation areas. Various federal and local agencies should also work together to urge the use of public transportation when possible. By communities nationwide revitalizing their transportation infrastructures, these localities will inadvertently work together to promote national goals of "spurring economic activity, enhancing competitiveness in the global marketplace, reducing dependence on oil, decreasing climate-changing greenhouse gases, and providing critical responses in emergencies". Furthermore, individual people will have the freedom of opportunity and choice, while saving money simultaneously.[25]

Communities that lack population concentrations to support public transit can look to enhance transportation options in alternative ways. For example, one suggestion provided to improve the business industry in these municipalities are plans for locally-provided "bicycle fleets". This would allow employees to complete local work-related tasks while reducing the amount of traffic congestion and pollution otherwise created. Nonetheless, supporting an overall bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure can be achieved through other means. Local leadership, for instance, can help to make it convenient for the populations that choose alternative modes. Those that choose to cycle or walk could be assisted through the construction of "…lockers, and secure bicycle parking at work sites." In communities creating safe, connected streets along with dedicated lanes with adequate facilities and lighting, leadership will begin to encourage the increased usage of these modes.[26]

In implementing specific plans, communities need to appeal to the needs of the local residents in a cost-efficient manner. This, therefore, also requires examining previous progress to determine what techniques have worked in achieving sustainability, while eliminating those that no longer are suitable. The *Sustainability Best Practices Framework* encourages communities to update their transportation models and master plans "to reflect all types (or modes) of transportation." Furthermore, it is also suggested that these local regions should include "transportation mitigation measures" for new development that do not solely address automobile concerns or those within public transit; thereby enabling all methods of travel. In developing short and long-term transportation objectives and policy statements, along with demand management solutions for various modes of travel including pedestrian, communities

can begin to address the numerous concerns that may arise in planning for transit sustainability. Directing public works projects to enhance the safety of these infrastructures can begin to foster sustained development.[27]

The second livability principle involves promoting "equitable and affordable housing." According to *The Partnership for Sustainable Communities*, this would involve expanding housing choices and enhancing energy-efficient potential in this sector. By lowering the burden of affording suitable housing and corresponding transportation, communities of individuals of all ethnicities, incomes, and ages will be able to strive to achieve maximum mobility.[28] Nonetheless, while achieving this goal would necessitate the renewal of existing structures, it may also require the construction of additional housing. Goal-oriented solutions and a balance of subsidies, however, could help to limit the amount of construction needed and focus on already obtainable resources and housing. Communities should look to assist incoming workers and their families with housing that is relatively close to good, stable jobs. Local leadership and efficiency, in coordination with federal strategy planning and corresponding incentives, could help to adequately support housing sustainability. By urging for an improved and affordable housing system, while maintaining the strength of the local workforce, communities will be concurrently addressing certain areas of improvement for other livability principles.[29]

The third livability principle encourages the development of increased "economic competitiveness". This would be implemented through the creation of employment centers, expanded educational opportunities and services for workers, and a larger access to markets for local businesses and organizations.[30] In requiring a "coordinated, goal-oriented investment", federal agencies and local efforts could respond more aptly to real-time needs of businesses including finance, infrastructure, technical support, etc. as well as address regional problems and obstacles to individual economic success.[31] Furthermore, many have advocated for the increased use of natural and constructed environments to increase economic competitiveness. Localized comprehensive plans and grant programs have shown success nationwide in supporting both short-term and long-term sustainability in this area.[32]

The fourth livability principle deals directly with supplying "support [for] existing communities". Again, federal funding could be utilized to modernize or revitalize community assets already in place in order to minimize the cost of formulating entirely new infrastructure. However, an emphasis on efficiency and economic growth would not be diminished through the support of existing communities. For instance, in creating "strategies like transit-oriented, mixed-use development and land recycling" to use with effective, current plans, communities are helping to prompt revitalization. This, in turn, would help to increase the productivity of public works and protect agriculture and natural resources.[33]

In addition to the localized support of these communities, it is also recommended that federal agencies promote further investment on the national level in order to "ensure housing, transportation and environmental interests build off of each other" and that long-term subsistence occurs. However, these investments must be calculated and strategically planned so as to help satisfy the interconnected needs of the target community. For example, in reflecting on previous community case studies, it was determined that "federal agencies should align their resources to maximize the return on their investments" in order to promote healthy, sustainable communities. By doing so, federal assistance, alongside local and regional partnership, can help ensure the success that this principle seeks to achieve.

The fifth livability principle seeks to "coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment". This would advocate for the streamlining of those policies, and corresponding funding, so as to allow for greater intergovernmental collaboration. By leveraging funding and making each branch of government accountable in these efforts, partnerships can continue to flourish and innovative ideas thereby fostered.[34] The report published in 2009 states that "coordinated investment across municipal borders would create right-sized, scale-appropriate solutions;" this would include comprehensive plans encompassing federal, state, and local agencies. As a result, leveraging these policies would additionally result in community sustainability and economic success. Similarly, with this principle, a crucial objective is removing barriers in order to maximize the potential of intergovernmental investment. Case studies have shown that this would include using limited resources for neighborhoods and communities, while also attempting to sustain economic development and access to opportunity for those individual community members. Ultimately, these coordination efforts help initiatives in remaining cost-effective and assist in alleviating resource demands. Regional strategies alongside federal reform prompted by agencies like HUD, DOT, and the EPA will therefore help achieve maximum impact.[35]

The sixth and final livability principle places a "value on communities and neighborhoods". This involves recognizing the distinctive characteristics of each community and thereby enhancing those characteristics that would help to further support a healthy and safe neighborhood. As a result, this principle applies to many suburban, rural, or urban areas and can be evaluated according to each region's progress in regards to their public spaces.[36] By revitalizing their various markets, plazas, parks, sidewalks, and business districts, municipalities can attract tourist interest which in turn benefits economic development. In addition, residents of these areas are more likely to have a higher quality of life and remain in the region and, in doing so, also invest in the local economy and culture. Consequently, this requires a preservation of existing beautification areas and construction of new, usable public spaces. It is crucial that local leadership continue to suggest physical recommendations to encourage constant improvement. It has been suggested that future policies of the *Partnership for Sustainable*

Communities should respond specifically to "place" and that "programming and investment is flexible enough" in order to appropriately adhere to localized goals. "Transit-friendly plans" must be considered in regards to overall transportation development as well as measured in accordance with other sustainable development strategies.[37]

Resources & Local Community Action

In reflection of these livability principles, governmental agencies including the *Partnership* have established several grant programs to assist in sustainability development. For instance, the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning (SCRP) Grant Program seeks to support "locally-led collaborative efforts" that bring together the varied interests of different entities within a region. This joint endeavor looks to address "housing, economic and workforce development, and infrastructure investments" in order to support long-term sustainability and economic growth. In particular, it focuses on regional partnerships of various cultural and social groupings in order to transition the livability principles into workable strategies. Reinvestment and development are crucial elements of successful, long-term implementation. These processes are assisted by continual review of progress achieved, and by analyzing corresponding data. Furthermore, it is important for the leadership in these communities to allow the citizenry to undertake a decision-making role.

There are also several federal initiatives which, in addition to funding, provide strategies and goals that local communities can take into account when attempting to develop sustainably. The Sustainable Housing Initiative, for example, helps to coordinate energy-efficiency, specifically in the housing sector, across all levels of government and throughout agencies. The Initiative works alongside HUD to track and evaluate data, as well as advise on annual policy goals.[38] In turn, the Housing and Transportation Affordability Initiative maintains a collaborative effort between HUD and the DOT. The goal of this program is to evaluate the connection between housing and the costs of transportation. By doing so, the initiative shows areas of impact on families and the resulting costs incurred when housing and transportation prices increase.[39] Similarly, the Regional Fair Housing and Equity Assessment program evaluates the possible disparities and impact on varying groups of a region when sustainability is sought. By enacting initiatives such as FHEA, local communities can nonetheless find easier methods of data collection and analysis, and can more aptly deal with associated issues.[40] Many states, as a result of the success of these federal efforts, have created their own similar programs. Such cohesion between these branches of government will indelibly assist local community development.

The EPA, in accordance with other agencies, has offered tools and key resources to local communities to aid in sustainability. For instance, the agency provides smart growth remedies

for "rural planning, zoning, and development codes." These guidelines would allow communities to realize suitable policy options while preserving their overall character. Furthermore, such changes would allow communities to make certain that any eventual development is "fiscally sound, environmentally responsible, and socially equitable." This would be accomplished through fiscal "impact analysis, commercial development" and recognizing efficient regional development patterns that encourage success.[41] The EPA also highlights the various funding opportunities available, and the methods by which local municipalities can apply for further support from federal and state governments. In addition, tools are provided that would enable local communities to share in planning techniques. The EPA also provides for methods of determining affordable, green-oriented housing and how to revitalize the land currently existing. This accounts for further cost-effectiveness. Thriving recycling programs, material reuse, integrated land use with transportation decision-making, and water quality that has low-impact on development are supplementary means of progress in maintaining sustainability.[42] All of these resources can be found on the Office of Sustainable Communities website; a part of the EPA portal.

There are specific goals and corresponding strategies provided for each target area which would further enable local communities to flourish sustainably. In regards to efficient transportation, it is crucial that local leadership is able to identify and evaluate current transportation policies across all departments within local government. It is also important to determine the impact that any transportation-related policies would have on efforts elsewhere, such as the influence on economic development, housing, or other government initiatives. Local municipalities must also be willing to ascertain and evaluate the rational basis for new policies and the methods to adequately achieving such progress. Several goals include keeping existing modes of transportation well maintained, promoting pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure, and training local employees and members of the community in how to operate vehicles efficiently. Communities should also determine whether existing subsidies are being used properly and whether they actually do promote sustainable transportation options. Furthermore, communities should work together to create regional transportation plans for public transit that make use of underutilized modes of travel, including ride-sharing programs.[43]

Selected Techniques and Approaches

Transportation Choices	• Keep public transit vehicles well-maintained to ensure sufficient performance • Provide incentives for employees to operate vehicles efficiently • Create ride-sharing programs • Proper training for employees in efficient use techniques • Work with private and local businesses to address transportation concerns • Develop plans for the creation and conservation of viable biking paths and walking areas (evaluate connection to local business centers and populated areas) • Engage the community (through public meetings) to determine their transportation concerns • Address underutilized transportation modes and seek greater management of each	• Collaborate with other agencies (cities, counties, & metropolitan areas) to share transportation-related information & coordinate planning goals • Update transportation models for all modes • Identify funding sources • Evaluate the potential for the consolidation of transportation-related governmental offices; thereby increasing sufficiency and outreach • Evaluate the potential for growth in public transit, and whether current transportation subsidies are being used efficiently • Evaluate the affect transportation options have on differing income-levels
Housing	• Encourage construction near job centers or transit stops. • "Location efficiency is essential to housing choice and affordability". • Adjust building codes and land use regulations to allow for green building and smart growth. • Using federal incentives related to housing in an equitable manner (create plans for implementation) • Offer technical expertise and assistance for community members and business leaders to remain involved in these projects • Incentivize improvements to current housing stock by providing loans, grants, or other assistance.	• Evaluate the affect income-levels have on equitable housing • Create long-term planning goals for housing revitalization and development • Evaluate mixed housing / transportation plans to determine enhanced mobility of the community • Work with fellow jurisdictions & governments to improve regional housing options
Economic Competitiveness	• Promote a diverse job market by lowering barriers to doing business while ensuring continued sustainability in the community • Increased educational opportunities to enhance the skills of the current, and	• Evaluate the needs and possible services that could be provided to enhance the experience of the worker and meet the needs of businesses

	incoming, workforces • Match "the right business, site, transportation assets, workforce, and market" to encourage sustainability – streamline resources and provide assistance to businesses • Determine socially responsible community investment (in the immediate and long-term) • Take part in regional economic development organizations	• Coordinated planning and investment in infrastructure
Support of Existing Communities	• Foremost – target funding toward existing communities; using available resources that will help maintain the overall process as cost-effective • Encourage "transit-oriented, mixed-use development" (multi-purpose) • Enhanced land recycling & safeguard agricultural land and natural resources • Identify opportunities for land revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, and adaptive reuse of existing structures. Market these opportunities to developers. • Investments in advanced energy and utilities • Evaluate & enhance educational infrastructure in existing communities to determine areas of improvement (i.e. in public schools) • New retail options, public transit, and better pedestrian and bicycle amenities • Coordinate public-private finance in supporting local communities	• Strategic planning in the layering of federal funds; efficient allocation of funding • Once plans are implemented, "fund the interconnected needs of a truly successful community, particularly access to retail, jobs, open space, and public transportation" • Overall goal of "reconnecting neighborhoods" • Plan for "issue-specific" funding opportunities and a return on community investment

Coordination	• Leverage federal policies and investment
	  • Align federal plans with local policy; thereby removing obstacles to enhanced collaboration between levels of government
	• Urge accountability among local leaders and nearby governments – a notion that will ultimately support sustainability
	• Continue to make smart energy choices
		• Long-term goal: align federal state, and local planning in formulating a comprehensive community plan
		  • "Right-sized, scale-appropriate solutions"
		• Realize the potential benefits of intergovernmental investment
		• Determine "interjurisdictional cooperation" in managing

	with renewable energy resources - in line with modern technology and methods • Determine the adequate "quality-of-life" standards for the specific community	community crises that may arise
Value Communities and Neighborhoods	• Address the concerns of all types of communities – urban, rural, and suburban • Invest in healthy and safe community development • Understand and address new challenges as they arise and continue to seek new methods in promoting sustainability • Promote the execution of "local economic, social, cultural, and leisure activities" by using existing and revitalized areas • Make the public aware of development and intended changes / have them engaged in decision-making to support their own communities (i.e. ongoing conversations)	• Valuing communities requires a "combination of housing, environmental, recreational, and economic development strategies" – i.e. proper, extensive implementation of above techniques • Planning must be flexible enough to work with intended goals

In regards to housing, public officials are also urged to adopt sustainability principles, particularly in promoting green-space living. These would be achieved through updated building codes and regulations, and by providing the private sector with incentives to increase green-housing options. Part of this development would also include educating the business community and the public on the viability of green space.[46] Furthermore, in analyzing a case study utilizing municipalities in California, it has been suggested that affordable housing be provided to support a wide range of income levels and corresponding lifestyles. It is important for local communities to determine the potential for additional housing near centralized business districts and where a mix of jobs remains present. This could be accomplished through calculating housing prices and the wages of entry level workers in the region, as well as through working with local housing authorities. It is also important that housing options be provided for the young and elderly; encouraging programs that provide incentives for such population development.[47] By implementing these changes, communities can begin to directly improve sustainable growth.

It is important that in encouraging economic competitiveness, local communities enable investment plans that reflect their desired sustainability. Any plans for future investing must be evaluated against current strategies. Local leaders must also be knowledgeable in the basics of community investment and be able to agree on common principles in order for sustainability to be achieved. Determining the local government's financial goals, as well as sustainability that can be achieved through working with nearby businesses can help to enhance competitiveness.

Furthermore, evaluating the needs of existing neighborhoods and interacting with the local residents to determine concerns can add to economic viability and long-term development.[48]

Conclusion

With so many local governments in the Commonwealth, we tend to get a more myopic view of the area as decisions are made within small political boundaries. If the Legislature does not tackle this issue, it is unlikely there will be enforceable planning on a regional level that makes it even more important for local governments to voluntarily plan and execute on a regional level. Livability principles require broad thinking as well. For example, a developer may not want to construct sidewalks in a new development, and in an effort to secure the development, a community may grant the waiver for sidewalks, not recognizing the long-term implications of a development without sidewalks. Infill development and adaptive reuse need to be more infused into planning in order to improve our communities and downtowns. This type of development reduces blight, crime, improves community aesthetics and appeal, and is usually more conducive to walking and public transit.

It is imperative that communities recognize the importance of sustainability in increasing economic, social, and infrastructural prosperity. Correspondingly, it is also vital that regional leaders, both those employed by the government and throughout the community, strive to achieve sustainable goals as outlined in the livability principles. It is important to note, however, that while federal incentive and assistance will help to facilitate growth, it is primarily community engagement and local leadership that will help to adequately enable such cost-effective and responsible development. The approaches must be from the "bottom-up" and tailored around the unique local needs of each community. By seeking to formulate both short-term and long-term goals to sustainability, communities nationwide can achieve continued longevity and success.

Preparing a Sustainable Community Plan should be undertaken, however without a major educational campaign as part of the planning effort to change the mind set in this area, it will become just a document on the shelf.

Recommendations

As noted in this document, there is compelling evidence that sustainability has the potential to foster a "systems approach" to integrating policies, programs, and practices in a progressive direction. Municipal and county governments across the United States have developed plans and reoriented their operations to foster sustainable practices[1]. Does this approach make sense for the two county area of Lackawanna and Luzerne County? There are over 200 local governments in the two county area. All are suffering from a decreasing tax base, pension

gaps, and demands for public services and safety. Financial capacity as well as human capacity in these organizations are at an all-time low. Perceptions and attitudes toward local government are negative due to continually rising taxes and fees. There is little understanding, both internal and external to government about sustainability, its importance, and the need for immediate changes both within and outside of government. In addition, Marcellus Shale drilling has commenced in NEPA and in significant proportions north of here. As a result, there are issues with wastewater, air pollution (diesel truck fumes), road damage, traffic congestion, excessive building, etc. in all communities with little or no planning capacity and/or policies, regulation, and zoning.

In order to foster a 'bottom-up" approach to sustainability for the two county area, an on-line survey will be created and disseminated to all communities to identify priorities, resources, and a community's strengths and weaknesses and their sustainability goals. This baseline data will be compiled and benchmarked to assess the current status of the participating communities relative to components used to calibrate their status towards meeting the livability principles. The results from this study will also be used to gauge interest for sustainability, and to identify communities and representatives that would be interested in participating in a team to develop a regional sustainability plan. The Institute will begin the development of several educational fact sheets to distribute to communities in an effort to create more awareness and understanding of the benefits of sustainable communities. The results, recommendations and from the survey will be presented at the Institute for Public Policy and Economic Developments 2015 10th Annual Indicators Report and Forum, May 2015.

Endnotes

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