

SANTA MONICA SUSTAINABLE CITY PROGRAM

Santa Monica, California

In August 1991, the City Council of Santa Monica established the Santa Monica Task Force on the Environment as a working group comprised of seven volunteer citizens. They were nominated by city staff and City Council members based upon their specific expertise in environmental issues.

Working with staff from the city's Department of Environmental and Public Works Management, Environmental Programs Division, the Task Force identified sustainability as a fundamental vision to guide the city's environmental policies and programs. The Task Force then worked to create the Santa Monica Sustainable City Program, with the purpose of providing the city with a coordinated, proactive approach to implementing the city's existing and planned environmental programs.

Developing community consensus

Over a year and a half, the Task Force sponsored an extensive period of public review, community outreach, and consensus-building related to the Sustainable City Program. The draft of the proposed program was initially distributed to City Council, city departments, Housing and Planning Commissioners, Chamber of Commerce Environment Committee members, and interested citizens. A formal survey process, designed to identify areas of consensus, was conducted through a mailed questionnaire. A larger community-based public participation process was conducted with the assistance of the Neighborhood Support Center. A community-wide meeting held on June 2, 1994 generated participation from over 100 Santa Monica citizens. Task Force members also made presentations at annual or board meetings of most of the city's neighborhood associations. The revised program document was made available for public comment. Final revisions to the document incorporated and addressed the several hundred responses received. On September 20, 1994, the City Council officially adopted the Santa Monica Sustainable City Program founded on eight guiding principles:

- The concept of sustainability guides city policy;
- Protection, preservation and restoration

of the natural environment is a high priority of the city;

- Environmental quality and economic health are mutually dependent;
- All decisions have environmental implications;
- Community awareness, responsibility, involvement and education are key elements of successful programs/policies;
- Santa Monica recognizes its linkage with the regional, national, and global community;
- Those environmental issues most important to the community, should be addressed first, and the most cost-effective programs and policies selected; and
- The city is committed to procurement decisions that minimize negative environmental and social impacts.

The Sustainable City Program is carried out in four major policy areas, representing the focus of both current and future city programs that adhere to the guiding principles and strive to attain specific targets established for each area. The policy areas include:

- Community and Economic Development;
- Transportation;
- Pollution Prevention and Public Health Protection; and
- Resource Conservation.

Program development

One of the first successes of the Sustainable City Program was establishing the Household Hazardous Waste Consumer Awareness Ordinance, also called the "Labeling Ordinance." To discourage dumping of hazardous waste, the Sustainable City Program brought retailers, city officials, and community members together to develop the Labeling Ordinance. It requires retailers to display labels that educate consumers on hazardous waste and encourages the use of non-hazardous substitutes. The Sustainable City Program will conduct public surveys to determine the success of the labeling.

Other programs in progress include a comprehensive energy retrofitting of all city facilities and a sustainable schools project. A working group of the Sustainable City Program is defining sustainable construction guidelines for the civic center redevelopment project. These regulations will then be applied to all future city construction. Other projects include an environmental awards program for businesses and an environmental audit (including water, energy, recycling and waste evaluations) of businesses that is provided by the city for free.

Indicators of effectiveness

To assess the program's effectiveness, benchmarks and quantifiable targets for measuring progress were established. Sixteen specific targets, or sustainability indicators, were selected. Each indicator has a base year value in 1990, a 1993 value and an assigned target for the year 2000. For example in 1990, water use was 14.3 million gallons per day (gpd), in 1993 it was 12 million gpd and the year 2000 target is 11.4 million gpd.

As work continues on the Sustainable City Program, it is envisioned that new indicators will be added and existing indicators will need to be revised or replaced.

The Task Force on the Environment and the city staff will prepare an Annual Sustainable City Report for the City Council that will assess progress made during the past year, evaluate overall program effectiveness, and recommend any program modifications that might be necessary. The Sustainable City Program is presently collecting data and developing measures of achievement for the first Annual Report to be submitted September 20, 1995.

City to Set Example

The Task Force on the Environment and many others in the community believe that city operations themselves should be the first to take the practical steps toward sustainability. The city will serve as a model for other institutions and organizations in the community as well as for other cities in the region and nation. In its first year of implementation, the Sustainable City Program's Procurement Working Group has developed a checklist to be utilized by all city departments to ensure that broad environmental implications of decisions are considered, and that decision-making occurs in conjunction with its goals. The checklist targets three areas that encompass sustainability issues in the city decision-making process: purchasing, construction and development, and programs and services.

Within each area, a decision tree categorizes the type of decisions and subcategories with a list of specific considerations important to the process. For purchasing durable and consumable goods, for example, the list of considerations includes cost, effectiveness, durability, recyclability, material source (virgin or recycled), resources used during manufacturing, local economic benefits and existing city purchasing guidelines. Once complete, the checklist will be supported by two databases. The first will provide city departments with information

on environmentally acceptable products, suppliers, consultants, sustainable policy options, best available technologies and best management practices. The second database will include existing and proposed city regulations, and policies as well as environmental and sustainability considerations.

A Volunteer Effort

Up to this point, the Santa Monica Sustainable City Program has operated without a formal budget. Task Force members work as volunteers and administrative overhead has been absorbed by the Environmental Programs Division of the City of Santa Monica. Because the program designs new policies for existing city programs, the costs of implementation are being covered by each individual department. The projects implemented under the program, such as water usage reduction and waste reduction have resulted in an overall savings for the city.

Funding for non-city projects is being secured from foundations and other forms of grant support. For instance, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project will fund an educational project on urban runoff and bay contamination.

The lack of a formal budget has restricted the number of personnel who can work directly on the program. To alleviate this problem, the program has developed a working group with individuals from all city departments who will assist with data collection and evaluation of progress for the annual report.

Key to the continued success of this project has been the support and active involvement of all key players in the program. Including the City Council, city departments, businesses, and citizens in the decision-making process has allowed the Sustainable City Program to move as quickly as it has.

Next Steps

The first year of the Santa Monica Sustainable City Program has been primarily organizational—defining the priorities of the program and how those will be implemented. With a number of programs underway, such as the Procurement Working Group and the Labeling Ordinance, the Sustainable City Program envisions that this next year will focus on programming. The Sustainable City Program already serves as an umbrella organization for existing city departments and is working to strengthen its relationships with community groups and businesses.

A 21 minute video, “Sustainable City: A city meeting its current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same,” which features citizen

How To Get in Touch with Santa Monica Sustainable City Program

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Scope: Local, urban
Inception Date: August 1991
Participants: Volunteer Citizen Task Force, City Departments, City Council, Santa Monica citizens
Project type: Sustainable indicators, natural resource conservation, public education
Methods used: Task Force with diverse fields of expertise, public survey, neighborhood presentations on program and community participation in revisions/recommendations, draft report for public comment, defining benchmarks and indicators of sustainability
Lessons learned: Through a multi-stakeholder process and strong local government leadership and example, much can be done without changing laws. Setting measurable targets for indicators and conducting periodic evaluations of the program's effectiveness help to guide policy decisions and can help to overcome bureaucratic inertia.

activism in sustainability, is available from the city for a nominal charge.

—Community Sustainability Resource Institute

UPDATE

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The City of Santa Monica's Sustainable Cities Program continues to evolve. A December 1996 progress report provided a detailed overview of the program, including an in-depth evaluation of its sustainability indicators. For each indicator a 1990 baseline

was developed and a target of the year 2000 was set. Data for calendar years 1993 and 1995 were provided.

Beyond the indicators, the report pointed out that sustainable policies and programs were being undertaken “piecemeal” by the city. The program's goals and objectives had not been integrated into the city's General Plan, Consolidated Plan, and various strategic plans for Human Services. Many city staff were not aware of the program and those that were did not consider it a high priority. And, the program was not well known or understood in the community. In general, the program did not have adequate funding or staffing to carry out its mandate.

The general recommendations of the report included updating an implementation plan, merging the goals and objectives outlined in the elements of the city's various strategic plans, and increasing community involvement.. A Sustainable City Roundtable may be created with representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, the school board and district, neighborhood organizations, non-profits, city commissions and, the City Council.

The majority of the issues are being addressed now. The Task Force on the Environment is providing greater oversight and guidance for program activities. In the city government, steps have been taken to give the program greater visibility.

More money has been provided allowing greater outreach to the community. In response to a public outreach process in which thousands of bus riders were asked how to improve service, significant changes were made including adding new buses, new routes, more buses to existing routes, and providing free bus service (on electric buses) downtown—all leading to increased ridership. A green neighborhood program is being developed, which will provide guidance in reducing energy consumption and water use, dealing with waste, and buying alternative products. And a program is being developed with the business community, which will work with hotels to present a green face to tourists. Possible options include offering “green suites” with organic sheets, non-toxic paints, and other environmentally friendly amenities.

Also in process is “A Framework for Sustainable Building Development Guidelines for the City of Santa Monica,” which when completed and adopted, will aid future city-owned construction projects.

—Community Sustainability Resource Institute