

GreenStep Cities Best Practice # 24 **- final draft for comment through May 2010 -**

- ❖ **Benchmarks & Community Engagement:** Adopt outcome measures for GreenStep and other city sustainability efforts, and engage community members in ongoing education, discussion and campaigns. **Required** for all cities

Category: Economic and Community Development

Summary

What's measured matters. Or put another way: if it matters, measure and report it. Adoption of a comprehensive set of sustainability indicators (that may have been developed as part of a sustainability plan) provides one vehicle for a city to report on accomplishment of multiple (and often interlinked) city goals, programs and projects, including GreenStep best practices and comprehensive plan goals.

This transparency and accountability to community members about city sustainability work fits well with educating and engaging community members as partners in building a more sustainable city. In total, actions to implement this best practice result in:

- A commitment to achieve specific outcome measures based upon a shared vision for the city.
- Educating community members about the city vision and desired outcomes.
- Engaging residents, businesses and institutions to change their behavior to help meet city goals.
- Reporting on accomplishments each year.

Best Practice Actions

- All cities must complete Action (1).
 - Category B cities must complete one Action in addition to Action (1).
 - Category C cities must complete at least Actions (1) and (2).
 - Completing an additional Action (beyond those required) allows this best practice to be counted as implementation of two best practices.
- (1) **REQUIRED FOR ALL CITIES:** Report progress annually to community members on implementation of GreenStep City best practices, including energy/carbon benchmarking data if gathered.
 - (2) **REQUIRED FOR CATEGORY C CITIES:** Organize goals/outcome measures from all city plans – comprehensive, parks, library, housing, stormwater, drinking water, transportation, economic development, energy, sustainability, etc. – and annually report to community members data that show progress toward meeting these goals.
 - (3) Engage community members in a public process involving a city council committee or community task force that results in city council adoption of and commitment to measure and report on progress toward sustainability indicators.
 - (4) Conduct or support an energy efficiency or sustainability education and action campaign for:
 - a. The entire community
 - b. Homeowners
 - c. Block clubs/neighborhood associations
 - d. Congregations
 - e. Schools and youth
 - (5) Conduct or support a community education, visioning and planning initiative using a sustainability framework such as:
 - a. Strong Towns
 - b. Transition initiatives
 - c. Eco-municipalities/The Natural Step
 - d. Post Carbon Cities
 - e. Permaculture
 - f. Natural Capitalism
 - g. Genuine Progress

- h. Healthy communities
- i. Multi-generation learning

GreenStep Advisor

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Implementation Resources

(tied to the relevant action by number)

- (1) For help with GHG assessments, contact the MPCA's Climate Change Corps: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/retap>
- (1) GHG baseline emissions inventory software available at no cost at <http://www.epa.gov/statelocalclimate/local/activities/ghg-inventory.html> or at a cost from private firms and from ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection campaign: <http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=800> and <http://www.icleiusa.org/action-center/tools/cacp-software>
- (2) Sample sustainability plans and templates for city departments (City of Portland, OR): <http://www.portlandonline.com/bps/index.cfm?a=155834&c=41630>
- (2) *Sustainability Planning Toolkit* for ICLEI members (who pay a fee): <http://www.icleiusa.org/sustainabilitytoolkit>
- (3) Resources and case studies for creating sustainability indicators (including Minneapolis sustainability indicators): http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/res_detail.cfm?id=1652
- (3) Two community sustainability assessment tools: http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/res_detail.cfm?id=2166
- (3) Twin Cities Compass, promoting the Twin Cities' well-being by measuring progress, reporting findings and providing strategies for action, led by Wilder Research: [More about Twin Cities Compass](#)
- (4) and (5) Campaigns and meetings can be conducted in a more resource-conserving manner: see the web site Green Gatherings, hosted by Ramsey County, which provides extensive guidance, checklists, case studies and directories in the areas of food, venue, waste and recycling, waste reduction, resource and energy use, travel and transportation, and construction and deconstruction: <http://www.MnGreenGatherings.org>
- (4) *The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior* and *Social Norms and Energy Conservation*: http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/res_detail.cfm?id=4256
- (4a, b) Minnesota Energy Challenge - <http://www.mnenergychallenge.org>
- (4b, c) City of Elk River's Project Conserve and other block-level action - http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/res_detail.cfm?id=4174
- (4d) Congregations Caring for Creation - <http://www.c3mn.net>
- (4e) Schools Cutting Carbon - <http://www.schoolscuttingcarbon.org/>
- (4e) Colleges and universities - <http://www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org>
- (4e) Youth Environmental Activists of MN - <http://www.yeamn.org>
- (5) Community engagement and visioning assistance is available from a number of organizations in Minnesota, such as regional initiative foundations, and regional development organizations / the Center for Community Stewardship: <http://www.greatermnnesota.net> and <http://www.mrdo.org> / <http://www.stewardacademy.com>
- (5) Training workshops, consultation and local assessments from U-Connect at the University of MN Extension: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/u-connect>
- (5a) A Strong Town approach emphasizes obtaining a higher return on existing infrastructure investments, to support a model for community sustainability that allows America's towns to become financially strong and self-sufficient: <http://www.strongtowns.org>
- (5b) Transition initiative resources: http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/res_detail.cfm?id=4135
- (5c) Eco-municipalities and The Natural Step resources: search <http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us> for "eco-municipality" to see four resources including *Toward a Sustainable Community: A Toolkit for Local Government* (University of Wisconsin Extension: 2007). Additional Natural Step resources available at <http://www.afors.org>

- (5c) *La Crosse Strategic Plan for Sustainability*: <http://www.sustainablelacrosse.org>
- (5d) Post Carbon Cities resources: <http://postcarboncities.net>
- (5e) Background on and local resources for permaculture: http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/res_detail.cfm?id=663
- (5f) Natural Capitalism's Local Action for Sustainable Economic Renewal: <http://www.natcapsolutions.org> [look under: Services]
- (5g) Background on the Genuine Progress Index: http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/res_detail.cfm?id=358
- (5h) The World Health Organization defines a healthy community approach as: "The fundamental conditions and resources for health are peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable economy, sustainable resources, social justice and equity." See health/community design materials at Design for Health: <http://www.designforhealth.net>
- (5i) A multi-generational vision initiative might involve the following and could be developed with the assistance of Bill Mittlefehldt, Clean Energy Resource Team (CERT) coordinator in Duluth: 218/726-6146, billmittle@aol.com
- Organize and run a community task force composed of students, adults and community elders to articulate a community vision to include business, community and environmental health goals.
 - Engage education or faith leaders in connecting students to the goals identified in the community vision. Students would be awarded hours of service-learning credit for projects designed to work on the goals.
 - Host a community event that honors the service, learning and commitment of students who work on the goals. This event could serve as an element in the annual city report to citizens required in Action (1) of this best practice.

Benefits

- In themselves, none of these planning, measuring and reporting actions produce direct sustainability benefits. However, the experience of cities that engage community members and publicly report on progress is very powerful: this accountability drives more action faster than if city plans and activities are mostly developed and discussed by only city staff and elected officials.
- For those conducting education and action campaigns to effect the following behavior changes, the MN Pollution Control Agency has calculated climate change benefits of each change. The thorough explanation, assumptions and documentation of these changes was done as part of a climate change exhibit for the 2009 Eco Experience at the MN State Fair (<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/ecoexperience>): <http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/download/ecoscale-calculations.pdf>
 - Eat local and organic food 20%, 50% and 80% of the time.
 - Stop unwanted mail and opt out of phonebook delivery.
 - Recycle beverage and food cans, bottles and jars.
 - Compost yard and garden waste.
 - Use reusable bottles, bags, kitchen and food ware.
 - Buy only long-lasting and repairable goods and clothing.
 - Recycle more around the house, like boxes from pantry foods and bathroom items.
 - Compost food waste.
 - Make 10% of purchases second-hand products.
 - Recycle when away from home and at work.
 - Take advantage of curbside pick-up of compostables.
 - Replace gas-powered mower and leaf blower with a manual push mower and rake.
 - Leave grass clippings on the lawn when mowing.
 - Buy USDA-certified organic fertilizers and use less of them.
 - Strategically plant trees and vegetation for shade and wind break.
 - Plant drought-tolerant native plants and use a rain barrel.
 - Install a green roof.
 - Buy green power from your local utility.
 - Install a solar-thermal system that provides 50% of home hot water use.
 - Install photovoltaic panels or a small wind turbine to generate about 20% of home electricity use.

- Regularly maintain vehicles.
 - Combine errands when using a vehicle.
 - Carpool or bus two times each week.
 - Bike to work two times each week.
 - Turn down water heater to 120 degrees.
 - Wash clothes in cold water.
 - Turn off unneeded lights and electronics.
 - Install 12 CFL bulbs.
 - Regularly maintain HVAC equipment.
 - Install a low-flow showerhead.
 - Use a programmable thermostat.
 - Add home insulation and seal air leaks.
 - Replace inefficient equipment/appliances.
- Education and action campaigns to effect the adoption and use of available technologies in U.S. homes and for non-business travel has the potential to cut 20% of household direct carbon emissions (7.4% of U.S. national emissions) per year by the tenth year of a program, with little or no reduction in household well-being. See *Household Actions Can Provide A Behavioral Wedge To Rapidly Reduce U.S. Carbon Emissions* (National Academy of Sciences: 2009): <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2009/10/23/0908738106.full.pdf+html>

Connection to State Policy

- The state of Minnesota requires various specific reports from cities, which typically contain data of interest/use to community members. Extracting the most relevant data from these submittals and presenting it in a useful way is a service to community members.

www.MnGreenSteps.org