

AN INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Sustainability in community development

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The aim of this chapter is to provide some basic background on the concept of sustainability and how it may apply to both the practice and content of community development. It starts with a brief overview of the history and theory of this term, then examines its implications for a number of areas within the context of community development. There is substantial agreement in the international literature on many of these implications; however, there is no single ideal of “the sustainable community,” nor any examples of such places. Rather, there are many strategies that can potentially improve the long-term health and welfare of communities by working with local history, culture, economy, and ecology. Every existing community has some features that others can learn from as well as many challenges to be addressed. For any given place, the task for professionals is to develop creative strategies and processes that will work within the local context and with its constituencies to improve long-term human and ecological welfare.

History of the sustainability concept

The reasons why sustainability has become a leading theme worldwide are well known. Concerns such as climate change, resource depletion, pollution, loss of species and ecosystems, poverty, inequality, traffic congestion, inadequate housing, and loss of community and social capital are ubiquitous. These problems are interrelated; for example, global warming emissions are caused in part by inefficient transportation systems and land-use patterns, poorly designed and energy-intensive housing, and economic systems that do not internalize the costs of resource depletion and pollution.

As far as anyone has been able to tell, the term “sustainable development” was used for the first time in two books that appeared in 1972: *The Limits to Growth*, written by a team of MIT researchers led by Donella Meadows (Meadows et al. 1972), and *Blue-*

print for Survival, written by the staff of *The Ecologist* magazine (Goldsmith et al. 1972). The Meadows report in particular was significant in that it used newly available computer technology to develop a “systems dynamics” model predicting future levels of global resources, consumption, pollution, and population. Every scenario that the team fed into the model showed the global human system crashing mid-way through the twenty-first century, and so the researchers concluded that human civilization was approaching the limits to growth on a small planet. This prediction was highly controversial. But revisiting the model in 2002, with three additional decades of actual data, the team concluded that its initial projections had been relatively accurate and that humanity has entered into a period of “overshoot” in which it is well beyond the planet’s ability to sustain human society (Meadows et al. 2004).

Other events in the 1970s also helped catalyze concern about the sustainability of human develop-

ment patterns. The first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Stockholm in September, 1972, brought together researchers and policy makers from around the world to explore humanity's future on the planet. The energy crises of 1973 and 1979 raised global concerns about resource depletion and brought these concerns home to millions of Americans at the gas pump. Public attention to the need for sustainable development received further boosts in the early 1990s as a result of United Nations conferences, such as the "Earth Summit" held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and in the early 2000s as knowledge spread about the threat of global warming. Although for many years "sustainability" was dismissed as a faddish or overly idealistic term, by the early twenty-first century it had become well established as a priority in many communities worldwide.

Perspectives

Several perspectives on sustainable development emerged early on that have characterized debates ever since (Wheeler 2004). One of these viewpoints is that of global environmentalism, which has focused on resource depletion, pollution, and species and habitat loss (Brown 1981; Blowers 1993). Some, such as the so-called "deep ecologists," have even argued that other species should be given the same rights as humans and that human population overall is too large and should be substantially reduced, presumably through wise family planning in the long run (Devall and Sessions 1985). Counter to these environmental perspectives – in fact directly opposing the limits-to-growth viewpoint – has been the approach known as technological optimism which holds that human ingenuity and technology will be able to conquer environmental problems. Although clearly this does happen sometimes, technology has not yet addressed many of the concerns described above.

A somewhat different set of perspectives, also originating in the 1970s, focus on the role of economics in addressing environmental and social prob-

lems. Economists within the newly emerging disciplines of environmental economics and ecological economics set to work to better incorporate environmental factors into economic models (Repetto 1985; Pearce et al. 1989; Costanza 1991). Some began to question on a much more fundamental level the desirability of endless economic growth on a planet with finite resources. Herman Daly, in particular, advocated a "steady-state society" with qualitative rather than quantitative economic growth (Daly 1973, 1980, 1996). Some recent economic thinkers have also advocated new forms of capitalism that better incorporate environmental and social concerns (Hayden et al. 1999; Barnes 2006).

A third main set of perspectives is that of social justice advocates, many of them in the Third World. These critics point out global inequities that have led the United States, for example, with about 4 percent of the world's population to consume some 25 percent of its resources (Goldsmith et al. 1992; Barlow and Clarke 2001; Shiva 2005). Such critics have argued that sustainable development first needs to address global disparities and that wealthier countries need to substantially reduce their consumption. Such a viewpoint has been met with varying opinions.

Finally, spiritually and ethically oriented observers have argued that the global crises facing humanity are due to misplaced values, a cognitive perspective that does not adequately recognize interdependency, and/or the lack of an ethical perspective that takes the needs of other societies and the planet into account (Daly and Cobb 1989; Goldsmith 1993; Capra 1996). These writers often build on precedents such as the "land ethic" of Aldo Leopold (1949) to argue that a new relationship between humans and the Earth and between humans and each other is necessary.

These different perspectives on sustainable development have led to different arguments, analyses, and proposals ever since. For example, economists tend to assume that market mechanisms, such as emissions trading systems or steps to set the proper prices on natural resources and pollution, will be able to address sustainability problems. Many envi-

ronmentalists, on the other hand, argue for strong regulation by the public sector and public investment in areas such as alternative energy and land conservation. Equity activists call for radical rethinking of global capitalism and tend to be highly critical of institutions such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. Meanwhile, ethically or spiritually oriented thinkers seek leadership and education toward a different set of societal values and, in some cases, seek guidance within organized religious traditions. Elements of all of these approaches seem useful at different times, and an awareness of all of these perspectives is important to form an understanding for pragmatic application of sustainability ideas within communities.

Sustainability definitions and themes

Despite the extraordinary influence of the sustainable development concept, no perfect definition of the term has emerged. The most widely used formulation is that issued by the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development (the "Brundtland Commission") in 1987, which defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission 1987). However, this definition is problematic, since it raises the difficult-to-define concept of "needs" and is anthropocentric, discussing the needs of humans rather than those of ecosystems or the planet as a whole.

Other definitions have similar problems. For example, relying on the notion of the "carrying capacity" (the inherent ability of a community or region to support human life and maintain environmental well-being) is difficult, since this is hard to determine for human communities. Relying on concepts such as maintaining natural and social capital is problematic, since these entities are difficult to measure and would require a complex economic calculus. One preference is simply to define sustainable development as development that improves the

long-term welfare of human and ecological communities and then move on to a more specific discussion of particular strategies.

Approaches

Sustainable development tends to require certain approaches on the part of community development leaders and professionals. One obvious starting point is to emphasize the long-term future. Rather than thinking about the next economic quarter, the next election cycle, or even the next 10 or 20 years (as is common in local planning documents), it becomes important to think what current development trends mean if continued for 50, 100, or 200 years. Often short-term trends that seem acceptable become disastrous when viewed in the longer term. One essential starting place is getting the public and decision makers to understand the long-term implications of current trends in addition to their near-term impacts.

Another main approach within sustainability planning is to emphasize interconnections between community development issues. Land use, transportation, housing, economic development, environmental protection, and social equity are all related. Historically, one main problem in planning has been that these issues have been treated in isolation; for example, highways have been planned without considering the sprawling land-use patterns that they will stimulate, and suburban malls and big box stores have been encouraged without realizing that they may lead to disinvestment and poverty in traditional downtowns. Viewing any given topic from a broad and holistic perspective, each individual decision can be better tied into sustainable community development as a whole. Likewise, developing an understanding of how actions at different scales interrelate is important as well. Building, site, neighborhood, city, region, state, national, and global scales fit together; actions at each scale must consider and reinforce actions at other scales. Recent movements such as the New Urbanism have emphasized a similar coordination of action at different scales (Congress for the New Urbanism 1999).

3) Another theme within sustainable community development is attention to place. Local history, culture, climate, resources, architecture, building materials, businesses, and ecosystems provide a rich and valuable context for local sustainability efforts. Working with these resources is also a way to build community pride and identity. For example, restoring a stream or river front can create an attractive new amenity for a community; identifying and restoring historic buildings can help give character to a neighborhood.

4) Tied to an emphasis on place is an acknowledgment of limits. Any given place can only handle so much change before it becomes something different (which is of course sometimes desirable). There are limits to the number of people or the amount of traffic that can be accommodated easily in any given community without undermining those place-based attributes that community members value. Likewise, there are limits to the quantities of resources that our society as a whole can use without damaging either local or global ecosystems. "Growth" itself must be reconsidered within a sustainable development paradigm, following Daly's notion, moving from quantitative expansion of goods consumed to qualitative improvement in community welfare. An organization named Redefining Progress has in fact developed a "Genuine Progress Indicator" that it believes can measure such a shift at the national level instead of the gross domestic product which, as is often pointed out, rises significantly during environmental disasters, such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill, since large sums are spent on clean-up and public relations (Talberth et al. 2006). At the local level, efforts to rethink growth should not take the form of exclusionary growth controls designed to keep out lower income residents by restricting the amount of multi-family housing, but should be a more comprehensive rethinking of how the community will coexist with local, regional, and global resource limits in the long run.

5) A final theme implicit within sustainable development is the need for active leadership by planners, politicians, and other community development professionals. In the past, these players have sometimes

facilitated unintended consequences of development. More active and passionate engagement by professionals is needed to address current sustainability problems, often seeking new alternatives to the status quo. In this quest it is important for community development professionals to work actively with elected leaders, community organizations, businesses, and the general public to develop public understanding and political support for action.

Thus the concept of sustainability may be seen to have roots going back more than 35 years, a variety of different perspectives taken by different advocates, and some themes that can guide professionals in seeking real-world applications. With this background, some specific areas of sustainable community development planning are presented below. Since fully considering the topic would require a very large space, the intent here is simply to suggest some possible directions for action.

Action areas

Environment

Sustainability is often thought of as primarily an environmental concern, and certainly environmental initiatives are important within any sustainable community development agenda. These can be of many sorts, but one of the most timely and challenging types of initiatives aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Global warming initiatives at the local level are increasingly common, thanks in part to the Cities for Climate Protection campaign coordinated by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), and require a very broad and interdisciplinary rethinking of many local government policies. In the U.S., some 27 percent of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions stems from transportation uses, another 27 percent is related to building heating, cooling, and electrical use, and about 20 percent results from industry (World Resources Institute 2007). Local governments can affect all of these areas.

Communities can best reduce private motor vehicle use — and resulting GHG emissions — through three types of initiatives: better land-use planning, better alternative travel mode choices for local residents, and revised economic incentives for travel. All of these types of initiatives are discussed later in this chapter. Local governments can also set an example by converting their own vehicle fleets, including buses, to cleaner technologies such as hybrid engines and use of compressed natural gas or biodiesel.

In terms of building heating, cooling, and electricity use, communities can modify building codes to require passive solar design of structures, higher degrees of energy efficiency, use of energy- and water-efficient appliances, and recycling of construction waste and debris. Subdivision ordinances can be modified to require solar orientation of lots in new subdivisions (with the long dimensions of lots and buildings facing south), and zoning codes can be amended to ensure solar access to each lot (by restricting the height of structures on adjoining lots near the southern property line). Other eco-friendly strategies such as handling rainwater runoff on-site, using graywater (lightly used wastewater) for irrigation or toilets, minimizing asphalt paving, promoting the use of alternative construction materials and green roofs, providing incentives for solar hot water or electricity, and encouraging shade trees to provide summer cooling may also be incorporated into these codes. In terms of electric power, communities may require that a certain percentage of electricity they purchase be generated from renewable sources. Some cities and towns have historically owned their own electric utilities which gives them an even greater ability to lower GHG emissions and promote green practices.

To reduce the 20 percent of GHG emissions stemming from industry, local governments can seek to identify such sources within their jurisdictions and work with them to reduce emissions, for example, by providing technical assistance, grants, or favorable tax treatment for eco-friendly practices. Giving priority to reducing emissions may also affect economic development policy choices, as discussed

later in this chapter. In short, a local greenhouse gas reduction program must address many different aspects of policy, integrating these initiatives together. Each of these steps will have other sustainability advantages, however, whether in terms of reducing traffic congestion and driving, lowering home heating costs, or developing more efficient industry and businesses.

Other types of materials use can also be extensively regulated at the local level. Of the three Rs — reduce, reuse, recycle — recycling has attracted the most attention in terms of municipal programs, but much greater energy and materials savings are likely in the long run from the first two. Reusing wooden shipping pallets or replacing them with more durable shipping materials offers many advantages over recycling them as chipped wood for mulch or throwing them away, as has been done in the U.S. until recently. A system of washing and reusing glass bottles, for example, as exists in many European countries and once existed in the U.S. until the widespread use of plastic containers in the 1970s, offers far greater energy savings than collecting, crushing, and recycling them. Communities may want to eliminate some materials altogether. Cities such as San Francisco have banned the use of non-biodegradable plastic bags. Portland, Oakland, and about 100 other cities have banned the use of styrofoam.

Ecosystem protection and restoration offers another main area for environmental initiatives. Whereas conservation was a main goal of previous generations of environmentalism, restoration has become a key objective in recent decades, especially in urban areas. Efforts to restore creeks, shorelines and wetlands, replant native vegetation, re-create wildlife corridors, and preserve existing habitat can form centerpieces of local environmental initiatives. Traditional forms of local government regulation, such as zoning codes and subdivision ordinances, can be amended to ensure that such features are protected within new development. For example, a community can require a substantial buffer (30–100 feet or more) along waterways, thus preserving both ecologically valuable riparian corridors and opening

up the possibility for a recreational trail system. Cities and towns may also require developers to preserve heritage trees and important areas of wildlife habitat on project sites.

Land use

Local governments in the U.S. have influence through regulation and investment over the development of land within their boundaries, and land use in turn can influence everything from how much people need to drive to how much farmland and open space remains near cities. Managing the outward expansion of communities is one main sustainability priority. "Smart growth" has been a rallying cry among U.S. local governments since the 1990s, especially since suburban sprawl often increases local costs for infrastructure and services (Burchell et al. 1997; Ewing et al. 2002).

Smart growth is generally defined as development that is compact, contiguous to existing urban areas, well connected by a grid-like network of through streets, characterized by a diverse mix of land uses, and relatively dense. Internationally there is some debate over just what degree of density or compactness is desirable in order to create more sustainable communities (Jenks et al. 1996). Certainly cities and towns need not approve high-rise buildings, although Vancouver, British Columbia provides a good example of how well-designed high rises can work well within residential neighborhoods. However, there is little question that most U.S. communities can use land far more efficiently than at present. In many cases this will require local governments to guide much more precisely where development will go and in what form rather than maintaining a reactive mode to proposals. Two major ways that cities and towns can do this is through area plans that contain precise design requirements for new development and through subdivision regulations that require connecting street patterns, neighborhood centers, greenways, and other community design elements.

Infill development, which includes reuse of existing built land as well as construction on vacant or

leftover parcels, is one main smart growth strategy. The tens of thousands of old shopping malls, business parks, and industrial sites in American communities offer prime opportunities for infill and for creating new, walkable, mixed-use centers for existing neighborhoods. But infill is often more difficult for developers than greenfield projects and may require substantial municipal assistance. Community development staff can facilitate dialogue between developers and local constituencies, assemble land through redevelopment powers, develop design guidelines or a specific plan for the area in question, and provide infrastructure and amenities to complement new development. In the past, much urban redevelopment in U.S. communities was not done with sufficient respect for the historical context and existing residents, but more context-sensitive approaches in the future can help ensure that such intensification efforts work well. For example, ensuring that historic preservation guidelines are in place would be an appropriate approach.

A good mix of land uses is a further goal frequently cited within the sustainable communities literature as well as by advocates of the new urbanism and smart growth. Since the 1910s, Euclidean zoning has generally sought to separate land uses within American communities, leading to the creation of vast housing tracts in one location, large commercial strips and malls in another, and office or industrial development in yet others. One result is that Americans need to drive long distances to get to basic destinations in life. Separation of land uses also makes it very difficult for anyone to walk anywhere, or for motorists to "trip-chain" – carry out a number of different tasks with one relatively short trip.

Improving land-use mix requires fundamentally rethinking local zoning codes, community, and economic development. Many more neighborhood centers can be included within new development on the urban fringe, while downtowns and office parks can have new infill housing added. Zoning can be changed for existing neighborhoods to allow a greater variety of local uses, including home offices, second units within or behind existing homes, and apartments or mixed-use buildings along commer-

cial streets. For example, the latter is especially important for allowing residential uses in the top floors of commercial buildings to use space more sustainably.

The scale of new development should be reconsidered as well. Size has been a defining feature of recent American land development whether residential, commercial, or industrial, but large scale is not necessarily desirable from a sustainability viewpoint. Such development often provides little diversity, interest, or sense of place, and can generate community impacts such as large amounts of traffic. Communities need to consider issues such as scale. Local sustainability planning is likely to emphasize smaller local businesses, more incremental growth of new neighborhoods, and more detailed specifications for development. Such modest-scale land development can potentially create more diverse, interesting, and vibrant communities in the long run, with fewer long-distance commuting needs.

Park and greenspaces planning is a final area of land use that is essential for more sustainable communities. Although such planning has gone through a number of eras, historically (Cranz 1982), many communities today emphasize networks of parks and greenways with a variety of environments for different user groups. Increasingly, native vegetation and restored wildlife habitats are part of the concept instead of the English-style trees-and-lawn planting scheme. The idea is to reconnect residents to the landscape on a daily basis, both through small-scale parks and landscape design near homes and through larger networks of greenways and wildlife preserves throughout urban areas.

Transportation

A community's transportation systems determine much about its resource consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, civic environment, and quality of life. For the past 80 years, both infrastructure priorities and patterns of land development in the United States have emphasized mobility via the automobile and that the per capita amount driven annually has

risen about 2 percent a year. Retrofitting communities to make other modes of transportation more possible – and to reduce the amount of travel needed in daily life – will be a long process. But everywhere some steps can be taken to encourage alternative modes of transportation.

Improving the pedestrian environment is one important step. This means not just adding or improving sidewalks in a given place, but coming up with a comprehensive package of street and urban design improvements to enhance the walking environment. Such a package may include street landscaping, pedestrian-scale lighting, narrower lanes and roadways, lower traffic speeds, improved medians, sharper curb radii at intersections, and better connected street patterns within new development. Pedestrian-friendly boulevard designs can be employed in place of unsightly and dangerous arterials in some communities (Jacobs et al. 2003). Traffic-calming strategies can be employed in residential neighborhoods to slow traffic. These employ a range of design strategies including speed humps, traffic circles, chicanes (staggered parking), and extensive landscaping.

In general, the street design philosophy in many communities is shifting from one of increasing the capacity and speed of streets, common several decades ago, to one of promoting slow-and-steady motor vehicle movement. Street design nationally is also moving toward "context-sensitive design" that respects existing historical, cultural, and ecological environments and promotes walking, bicycling, public transit, and neighborhood use of streetscapes (Federal Highway Administration 2007).

In the past couple of decades, an increasing number of communities have developed bicycle and pedestrian plans to coordinate investment and policies for these two modes of transportation. Ever since the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), federal transportation funding has been more flexible, allowing resources to be used for these purposes. An increasingly creative mix of public transportation modes is also appearing in cities and towns (Cervero 1998). Large-scale metro and light-rail systems have been

with complete streets

built in cities ranging from Dallas to Denver, Portland to Phoenix. But "bus rapid transit" systems, in which high-tech buses provide light-rail-style service, provide a less expensive alternative to rail systems in places such as Los Angeles and Albuquerque. Some communities are experimenting with "ride-on-demand" service using small vehicles such as vans, while others have built old-fashioned streetcars with very frequent stops in urban areas. The ideal is to provide residents with a web of interwoven transit options. "Transit-oriented development" (TOD) land-use strategies can then seek to cluster new development around transit routes, increasing ridership, and providing a range of destinations and residences close to transit.

Pricing is a final, and controversial, piece of the transportation planning puzzle. The aim is to make both transit and ride-sharing attractive and discourage long-distance drive-alone commuting. Car pools ("high-occupancy vehicles") are often given their own, toll-free lanes on urban freeways, while a few places have made transit use cheap or free. Portland, Oregon's "fareless square," including most of the city's downtown, is one example. Cities and towns can provide economic incentives for residents to drive less. For example, some communities raise the cost of parking (Shoup 2005) and develop employer-based trip reduction programs. Internationally, a number of large cities, including London, have established toll zones requiring motorists to pay a substantial sum to enter city centers. Most European cities also have at least some parts of their downtowns that are pedestrian-only zones.

Housing

A community's housing stock affects its sustainability in several ways. For one thing, large amounts of energy and materials are required to construct and maintain housing. As previously mentioned, communities can revise local building codes to require more energy-efficient structures and appliances as well as water-efficient plumbing fixtures. But on a larger scale, imbalances of housing with

jobs and shopping generate high levels of motor vehicle use, traffic, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. "Jobs-housing balance" has become a mantra for many communities. Ideally, communities will provide slightly more than one job per household (since many households have more than one worker). The price and size of the available housing must also balance with the needs of workers employed in the community. One typical problem is lack of affordable housing for service workers, teachers, firefighters, nurses, and other essential professions. These personnel must either pay a large percentage of their salary for housing or commute from more affordable communities further away.

There is no easy solution to a community's housing affordability problems, but several strategies taken together can potentially make a difference. One basic step is to ensure that sufficient land is zoned for apartments, condominiums, townhouses, duplexes, and other forms of housing that tend to be less expensive. Another common strategy is "inclusionary zoning" in which developers are required to include a certain percentage (often 10 to 20 percent) of units affordable to households making a certain percentage (typically 80 percent) of the county median income. Other strategies include legalizing and encouraging the creation of secondary units on existing single-family home lots, encouraging creation of land trusts that will lease housing units at below-market rates, and subsidizing nonprofit affordable housing providers to build affordable housing.

Economic development

Economic development strategies are among the most challenging to revise from a sustainable community perspective, in part because in the past they have been so often focused on what might now be seen as unsustainable development. Some cities and towns have traditionally sought any available form of economic growth regardless of impact - rapid land development, malls, big box development, and casinos. Although substantial municipal

subsidies are often offered to such businesses, gaining them does not necessarily guarantee the community a stable and sustainable future. Multinational firms may move their jobs elsewhere. Big box retailers may negatively impact smaller locally owned businesses. Rapid suburban expansion can bring traffic, overburdened local services, and loss of local culture and identity.

Sustainable economic development is instead likely to emphasize the nurturing of green and socially responsible employers within a community. These businesses will use local resources, have clean production practices, pay decent wages, and contribute back to the community through civic involvement. They will be of a range of sizes, including many relatively small, locally owned enterprises with deeper community roots than current employers (Shuman 1998, 2006). Rather than seeking rapid overnight expansion, such firms will add employment at a slower and more sustainable rate.

If this sounds like an unachievable ideal given the nature of the economy, it may well be. However, local community development efforts can help bring this vision about in a number of ways. One is by supporting the existing local businesses and encouraging them to undertake both innovation and greener production practices. Another strategy is to grow new businesses of desirable types, frequently through the creation of business incubators that provide affordable office space and shared services for start-ups, and the preferential issuance of public contracts to green businesses. Investing in public education and training is a further municipal commitment to its economic future. Finally, in recent years many jurisdictions have passed "living wage" laws requiring that workers be paid significantly more than the federal minimum wage. This policy improves both social equity and potentially increases workers' spending power within the community.

Social equity

As a symbol of the integrating approach common within sustainable development, advocates have

often spoken of the "three e's" – environment, economy, and equity. Of these, equity is by far the least well developed and perhaps the most difficult to bring about in practice. Such rising inequality brings about many sustainability problems – from the degradation of ecosystems by impoverished people struggling to survive, to the loss of social capital and mutual understanding essential for healthy democracies.

Ensuring social equity is in substantial part the responsibility of federal and state levels of government which can promote it through tax policy, funding of social services, establishment of decent minimum wages, and guarantees of fair treatment and civil rights. Local communities can promote equity goals as well. Providing adequate amounts of affordable housing, livable minimum wages, and a supportive environment for local businesses are among the ways to do this. Ensuring that underprivileged neighborhoods receive excellent services, schools, parks, and other forms of municipal investment is also important. Environmental justice is another key equity theme; too often lower income neighborhoods and communities of color have borne the brunt of pollution, toxic contamination problems, and unwanted facilities. Cities and towns can address environmental justice through active steps to protect those most at risk, improve siting of hazardous land uses, bring about fairer and more transparent decision making, and include at-risk populations in local government processes.

Additional services important for social equity include adult education and literacy programs, preschool and after-school activities, drug and alcohol abuse treatment programs, and assistance for those with disabilities, mental health issues, or a history of homelessness. Good public education in general, of course, is also crucial. Such initiatives can help build the human capital important for healthy communities in the long run. The problem of funding always exists, but grant opportunities are available for certain types of programs, and creative, sustained attention by community development officials and political leaders can help build better support in the long run. Building a "healthy"

community in all aspects supports long-term sustainability.

Process and participation

A healthy democracy is an important element of sustainable communities in that it can enable informed decision making, meet the needs of diverse constituencies, and fulfill ideals of fairness and equity. For this reason, community sustainability groups have emphasized a variety of process indicators that reflect the health of our political system and society. Sustainable Seattle, for example, included "voter participation," "adult literacy," and "neighborliness" in its set of sustainability indicators (Sustainable Seattle 1998). The Jacksonville Community Council included not just voter registration, but "Percentage of people surveyed who are able to name two current City Council members" in its quality-of-life indicators, which have been updated for nearly 25 years now (Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. 2006).

For a healthy democracy, three things are needed: a clean, open system; real choices in elections; and an informed, active electorate. In particular, conflicts of interest, often around land development, are rife within U.S. local government. Historically, "growth coalitions" of developers, landowners, real estate interests, construction companies, and politicians have dominated local politics in many communities (Logan and Molotch 1987). These interests have often funded electoral candidates, and their members have frequently held elected or appointed office. Ending such conflicts of interest and improving the transparency and visibility of local government processes is important, as is making public office attractive to a wider variety of candidates including those without wealthy backers. Ensuring high participation rates in elections and citizen knowledge of development issues is a related challenge.

As anyone involved in community development knows, public participation in local government decisions is great in the abstract but difficult to ensure in practice. It can be hard to get people to turn out for meetings, ensure participation of diverse

constituencies (especially lower income groups and communities of color), and facilitate involvement that is constructive rather than oppositional. From a local residents' point of view, public involvement exercises often do not seem to include real opportunity to shape decisions.

From a sustainability perspective, it is vitally important to establish a creative and collaborative local government decision-making environment in which participants can agree on positive, proactive strategies, "think outside the box," and learn to respect each others' points of view. Too often in recent years community events have been oppositional in tone, involving mutual suspicion and animosity as well as NIMBY ("not in my backyard") groups simply trying to stop projects that are not in their own self-interest. In order to enable a constructive, collaborative planning environment instead, a number of procedural reforms can help. Transparent and well-publicized government processes can ensure that residents understand what is going on and do not feel excluded by back-room deals. Strong conflict-of-interest regulation can alleviate citizens' sense that officials are just out for special interests. Workshops and charrettes (design workshops) can be conducted with a collaborative and collegial tone rather than the top-down and patronizing styles sometimes found in reality. And local residents' ideas can be very consciously incorporated into planning alternatives and reflected back to them so that it is clear what their input has been.

That being said, it is very important for local residents to understand that they are not the only stakeholders involved in public decisions. "Community-based planning" is frequently seen as focusing just on the local neighborhood or town. But in line with the sustainability themes discussed earlier, any given decision affects multiple overlapping communities at different scales including regional, national, and global levels. From a sustainability perspective, the practitioners' role is to take into account the needs and concerns of all of these different communities, including the needs of the planet itself, and to help local residents understand this complex picture.

Operating as a professional with a concern for sustainable community development may require a great many skills. It may require active efforts to frame debates, develop background information, and outline alternative courses of action. It may require careful organizing both within government and within the community to pull different constituencies together and develop institutional and political backing. It may require specific intervention in debates to call attention to the long-term implications of decisions. It may require constant efforts to weave together all aspects of community development, including physical planning, urban design, economic development, social welfare policy, and environmental planning, so that the public understands the interconnections. This is the challenge of working within local government and communities.

Good communication, networking, facilitation, presentation, and political skills can help in this regard as does passion and a sense of humor.

Conclusion

Sustainable community development is clearly a major challenge in the early stages of a process that will take hundreds of years in order to figure out how to live indefinitely into the future on a small planet, in reasonable harmony with both natural ecosystems and each other. Although sustainable community development may at times seem like an overwhelming task, it is also one that can make the job of planners and community development professionals potentially very rewarding and meaningful.

CASE STUDY: CITY OF SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA'S SUSTAINABLE CITY PROGRAM

One of the communities that understands the importance of integrating sustainability into overall community development is Santa Monica, California. Beginning in 1994, the City Council adopted a Sustainable City Program to address issues and concerns of sustainability. In 2003, the Sustainable City Plan was adopted, built on guiding principles of sustainability and focused on eight goal areas:

- 1 Resource conservation
- 2 Environment and public health
- 3 Transportation
- 4 Economic development
- 5 Open space and land use
- 6 Housing
- 7 Community education and participation
- 8 Human dignity

An innovative approach to guiding and monitoring success toward these goals is a comprehensive community indicator system that provides measurements of goal attainment. For example, the indicator set for economic development includes tracking specific issues such as quality job creation, resource efficiency of local businesses, and the balance between housing and jobs. The indicator system for this goal area can be seen at: www.smgov.net/epd/scpr/EconomicDevelopment/EconomicDevelopment.htm. Specific targets have been designed for many of the indicator areas. This allows for further progress tracking and provides information to consider adjusting policies or programs that may or may not be working as planned.

Having the Sustainable City Plan as a guiding document, the Sustainable City Program strives to integrate sustainability into every aspect of City government and all sectors of the community (City of

Santa Monica 2006). Collaboration among sectors as well as intensive evaluation and monitoring encourage desirable outcome achievement. This plan is also coordinated with overall comprehensive planning as well as capital budgeting and other local government tools to aid in decision making for investments and service provision.

The Editors

Keywords

Sustainability, sustainable development, community development, planning.

Review questions

- 1 Why is there "no single ideal" of a sustainable community?
- 2 How does a sense of place affect the context for local sustainability efforts?
- 3 Using the six action areas, describe one recommendation from each and explain how it influences community development outcomes.

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