

Memorandum

To: City of North St. Paul
From: Spencer Peck
Date: May 8, 2014
Re: Sustainability Definition Policy Statement

Introduction

This policy statement is designed to provide information regarding sustainability to both the residents and leaders of the City of North St. Paul. First, a brief review of the global and regional context of climate change, natural resource consumption, environmental degradation, and social inequities sets the stage for the importance of sustainability. Second, the concept of sustainability is defined on a broad level. Finally, the memorandum outlines what actions North St. Paul can take to incorporate sustainable practices throughout the community.

Global and Regional Context

The importance of sustainability has never been greater. The global population will increase to 9.3 billion by 2050.¹ Regardless of where this population growth is centered, it will undoubtedly strain the Earth's resource base. Levels of consumption are inequitably distributed: the wealthiest 20 percent of the global population consumes more than 75 percent of the world's resources.² Nearly 40 percent of global carbon emissions were produced by the wealthiest 20 percent of the global population. Research from both natural and social science scholars shows that communities and individual decisions are linked to impacts both locally and across the globe.³ The United States consumes and pollutes at staggering rates. From 1990-2009 the U.S. alone emitted nearly one quarter of the world's total carbon emissions from fossil fuels.⁴ The average American citizen requires 17 to 20 acres of land to provide the resources consumed. In contrast, the global average is about 7.5 acres.⁵ Most of U.S. consumption and emissions are the result of living in sprawling, inefficient, unplanned communities.⁶

Although some may argue that sustainability is an insidious plot on the part of the United Nations, or simply a buzz word with little real impact, sustainable development and practices may offer an effective, feasible, accessible solution to these problems. Sustainability can be very hard to define because it is an attempt to capture a multitude of ethical and moral values, dynamic ideas, and aspects of human existence valued differently by different individuals. With little doubt, this concept can be described as a "wicked problem,"⁷ and is certainly an issue that extends well beyond the scope and power any one city. Despite the weaknesses inherent in sustainability, it offers an understandable and accessible solution to everyone, regardless of education, location, belief system, or economic condition. More importantly, it may provide a sense of hope in the face of pernicious and seemingly insurmountable environmental problems.

The most simplistic definitions describe sustainability as the capability to equitably meet the vital human needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,⁸ by using technology and science to modify our current lifestyles and practices, and to anticipate future needs. Ultimately the goal is to preserve and protect human systems *and* natural ecosystems and resources, via thoughtful integration and collaboration. In most conceptions, sustainability describes both a process of decision making, and a desired, measurable outcome in which the use of natural resources, required for the continuation of all life, is in balance with the Earth's ability to replenish and produce resources and materials.

Sustainability in North St. Paul

North St. Paul and its residents are in a position to protect the natural environment and its ability to support human life by working together to implement concepts of sustainability in their current activities, and long range planning practices. Planning for sustainability promotes responsible development and should not be described as anti-development. It requires a democratic process of planning to achieve the greatest common good for all segments of our population, protect the health of the environment and assure future generations of the resources they will need to survive and progress. The American Planning Association, the nation's leading planning organization, developed four dimensions which, it believes all sustainable cities must have:⁹

1. Sustain communities as good places to live, and that offer economic, social and environmental amenities and opportunities to their inhabitants;
2. Sustain the values of the society—including individual liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and democracy;
3. Sustain the biodiversity of the natural environment, both for the contribution that it makes to the quality of human life and for its own inherent value; and
4. Sustain the ability of natural systems to provide the life-supporting "services" that are rarely counted by economists, but which have recently been estimated to be worth nearly as much as total gross human economic product.

The City of North St. Paul and its residents are well placed to begin taking steps to ensure future local residents will be able to live happy, healthy, productive lives. North St. Paul has already taken important steps towards sustainability, including participating in the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's GreenStep Cities program,¹⁰ and collaborating with the University of Minnesota and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs in the Resilient Communities Project.¹¹

Defining what sustainability means to North St. Paul is one positive step the community could take. A clear, succinct, understandable definition is important for several reasons:

1. Provides a common language for all stakeholders interested in discussing and deciding the future of North St. Paul;
2. Creates an inclusive and dynamic process where all residents and leaders are included and opinions and ideas are valued;
3. Outlines objective and subjective criteria by which decisions related to planning, community development, economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity can be measured and evaluated;
4. Demonstrates the commitment of the City's citizens and leadership to improving social relations, economic health, and the environment; and
5. Sets an example for neighboring communities to aspire to, or follow.

This definition need not be exhaustive and all encompassing. Nor does it need to be complex, technical, or scientific. Rather, it is an opportunity for the community and its leaders to create a statement of sustainability that considers the history, character, resources, and values of the City of North St. Paul. Sustainability can be defined and implemented in a manner that both the residents and the City gain substantial benefit. The process of sustainable development and planning is not about forcing people to live less satisfying, limited lives. Instead, it is an opportunity to ensure the continued existence of the community, while guiding future development, and as an opportunity to leave a positive legacy of awareness, proactivity, and respect.

¹ United Nations Population Fund, *The State of World Population 2011: People and Possibilities in a World of 7 Billion*, <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2011/EN-SWOP2011-FINAL.pdf> (2011) (last visited May 1, 2014).

² World Bank, *Development Indicators: 2.7 Distribution of Income or Consumption*, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/table2_7.pdf (2008) (last visited May 1, 2014).

³ See, Peter D. Sutherland & John W. Sewell, *The Challenges of Globalization*, 13 *Earth Island Journal* 47 (1998); Andreas Malm, *China as Chimney of the World: The Fossil Capital Hypothesis*, 25 *Org. & Env't.* 146 (2012); V.F. Krapivin & Costas Varotsos, *Globalization and Sustainable Development Environmental Agendas*, Springer (2007); Simon Retallack, *Why Are We Failing the Planet?*, 32 *Economist* 12 (2002).

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *International Statistics: Carbon Dioxide Emissions for Fossil Fuels, by Country*, https://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/international_statistics.html (last visited Mar. 26, 2014).

⁵ World Wide Fund for Nature, *Living Planet Report*, 42, available at http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/1_lpr_2012_online_full_size_single_pages_final_120516.pdf (2012) (last visited May 1, 2014).

⁶ See *i.e.*, Md. R. Shammin et al., *A Multivariate Analysis of the Energy Intensity of Sprawl versus Compact Living in the U.S. for 2003*, 69 *Ecological Economics* 2363 (Oct. 2010); Steve Hankey & Julian D. Marshall, *Impacts of Urban Form on Future U.S. Passenger Vehicle Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, 38 *Energy Policy* 4880 (Sept. 2010).

⁷ See, Horst W.J. Rittel & Melvin Webber, *Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning*, 4 *Policy Sciences* 155 (1973).

⁸ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, 11 United Nations (1987), available at http://conspect.nl/pdf/Our_Common_Future-Brundtland_Report_1987.pdf (last visited May 1, 2014).

⁹ American Planning Association, *Policy Guide on Planning for Sustainability*, (2000) available at <https://www.planning.org/policy/guides/pdf/sustainability.pdf> (last visited May 1, 2014).

¹⁰ Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, *GreenStep Cities*, at <http://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/>.

¹¹ Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, *Resilient Communities Project*, at <http://www.cura.umn.edu/RCP>.

RESOLUTION ADOPTING
A STRATEGIC DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABILITY
TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT, AND COMMUNITY OF THE CITY OF
NORTH ST. PAUL

WHEREAS, the United States of America has enacted measures designed to reduce energy use, create more renewable energy, improve social, environmental, and economic equity, to address climate change, to reduce pollution, and to encourage sustainable development;

WHEREAS, the State of Minnesota has adopted laws to promote sustainable development including the Next Generation Energy Act, a Climate Action Plan, significant mass transit investments, created the Minnesota GreenSteps Cities program, and adopted sustainability action plans for all executive level departments;

WHEREAS, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council adopted bold energy reduction goals and incorporates sustainable housing and infrastructure planning in its regional plans;

WHEREAS, many cities throughout the nation, both large and small, are pursuing sustainability programs that provide economic and quality of life benefits such as reduced energy bills, green space preservation, air quality improvements, reduced traffic congestion, improved transportation choices, and economic development and job creation through energy conservation and new energy technologies;

WHEREAS, numerous cities throughout Minnesota, including St. Paul and Minneapolis, have adopted vigorous climate change plans, sustainable development policies, and “living” streets programs;

WHEREAS, the City of North St. Paul is a Step 2 GreenStep City, a program that aims to provide Minnesota cities a clear pathway to greater sustainability based upon implementing best practices specific to Minnesota;

WHEREAS, in pursuit of its GreenSteps Cities commitment, North St. Paul has conducted several important actions to reduce energy use, actively manage land use, promote walking and active living, and encouraged locally targeted economic and community development. Furthermore, the City is actively facilitating the adoption of further GreenStep City sustainability best practices, and hopes to become a Step 3 GreenStep City in the near future;

WHEREAS, The Comprehensive Plan for the City of North St. Paul identifies goals in the area of transportation, land use, environment, and economics and these goals and objectives aligns with the principles of sustainability; and

WHEREAS, the City Council of North St. Paul is responsible for the governance, management, and efficient operation of the City, and has been granted authority to legislate on matters of importance to the City and its residents.

NOW, BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, that the North St. Paul City Council adopts the strategic definition of Sustainability as attached in “Exhibit A.” As such, the City of North St. Paul acknowledges its responsibility and leadership in creating a sustainable community – locally, regionally and globally.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City understands that this definition will serve as guidance for implementing future community improvement, and development. The ideals and concepts described in the definition will be integrated as fully as possible in City activities including planning, community development, active living, infrastructure development, environmental protection and education, energy production and consumption, purchasing, stormwater management, and protection and conservation of water resources;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the North St. Paul City Council directs the City Manager to integrate this definition in guiding long-term planning and day-to-day City administration. The City Council also directs the City Manager to provide annual updates to the City Council regarding implementation and achievements as a result of integrating sustainability in day-to-day operation of the city.

This Resolution shall become effective immediately upon its passage.

Exhibit A

Sustainability Defined

Sustainability considers current and future generations and acknowledges the interdependence of human social, economic, and political activities on the natural environment, including air, water, soil, and living things. Any action affecting one part affects all other parts of our social, economic, and natural environment. A sustainable city is more capable of:

- Maintaining and improving natural, economic, social, cultural, and political systems and resources for many generations.
- Fostering development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- Promoting values that encourage development, and living standards that are within the bounds of the ecologically possible, and to which all can reasonably aspire.
- Persisting over generations and is future-oriented, flexible, and resilient.
- Integrating efficient operations, saving money and energy, reducing pollution, and conducting future-oriented planning.

A sustainable city recognizes that the municipal leadership serves a critical role as stewards of the local environment, community, and resources. Moreover, as individual citizens, we are each responsible for pursuing the common good by informed, active participation. Sustainable cities support individual efforts by ensuring the public's best short- and long-interests are the foundation of all decision-making and the criteria by which success is measured. A sustainable city seeks to:

Goal	Strategies
Protect and enhance the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use energy, water, and other natural resources efficiently and cleanly ; • Limit pollution to levels that do not damage natural systems; • Minimize waste, then reuse or recover it through recycling, composting, or energy recovery, and sustainably dispose of what is left; and • Value and protect the diversity of nature ; • Create or enhance places, spaces, and buildings that work well and are human in scale and form.
Enhance social equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value and protect diversity and local distinctiveness and strengthen local community and cultural identity; • Protect human health and amenity through safe, clean, pleasant environments; • Emphasize preventative, not just reactive, health service action; • Ensure access to healthy food, clean water, and affordable housing and transportation for everyone in the community; • Maximize everyone's access to the skills and knowledge needed to fully participate in society; and • Empower all sections of the community to participate in decision making, and to consider the social and communal impacts of decisions.
Promote economic success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a vibrant local economy that provides satisfying and rewarding work without damaging the local, national, or global environment; • Encourage necessary access to facilities, services, goods, and other people in ways that make less use of automobiles, while minimizing impacts on the environment; and • Make opportunities for culture leisure, and recreation are readily available to all.

Implementation Guidance

Exhibit A

The following criteria are useful in determining if decisions are in the spirit of this definition:¹

- **Future Generations:** Does this action meet present needs without jeopardizing future generations.
- **Interrelationships:** Does this action take into account the environmental, economic, social and political requirements for its success, and its impact on the natural environment and human activities.
- **At each stage:** After a clear image of the future is developed, answer the following questions using the attached diagram to stimulate thinking:
 - What else must happen in order for this ideal scenario to play out? Consider all interrelated dimensions of the ecosystem (environmental, social, economic and political)
 - What was the impact of the policy or program on other elements of the ecosystem?
- **At the scoping stage:** Imagine that it is 100 years from now. Imagine that the problem(s) being addressed has been solved as a result of the far-sighted action taken in the present year.
 - Describe what the community is like as a result of this policy or program under consideration.
- **At the options stage:** Imagine that it is 100 years from now.
 - For each alternative, describe what the community is like assuming the alternative has been fully funded and implemented consistently overtime.
- **At the recommendation stage:** Imagine that it is 100 years from now. You are analyzing the impacts of this policy or programs adopted in your present year. Assume that the policy or program has been fully funded and implemented consistently over time.
 - Describe what community is like, considering all the consequences of the policy or program under considered.

¹ Adopted from the City of Olympia Sustainability Resolution

Exhibit A

Sustainability Visualized

