

Defining Sustainability in City Policy

A Resilient Communities Project–GreenStep Cities Guide

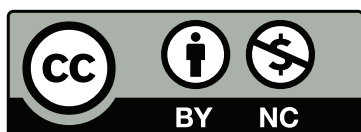


Resilient Communities Project

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This report was produced by the Resilient Communities Project (RCP), a program at the University of Minnesota whose mission is to connect communities in Minnesota with U of MN faculty and students to advance local sustainability and resilience through collaborative, course-based projects. RCP is a program of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). More information at <http://rcp.umn.edu>. Funding for the report was provided by GreenStep Cities, a program of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, through a grant from the McKnight Foundation. More information at <https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us>.

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 Resilient Communities



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Minnesota GreenStep Cities

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Memorandum: Sustainability Definition Policy Statement

UMN Course: LAW 7012: Land Use, Energy and Environment Clinic

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Original Student Report: <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/194807>

Sustainability in Minnesota

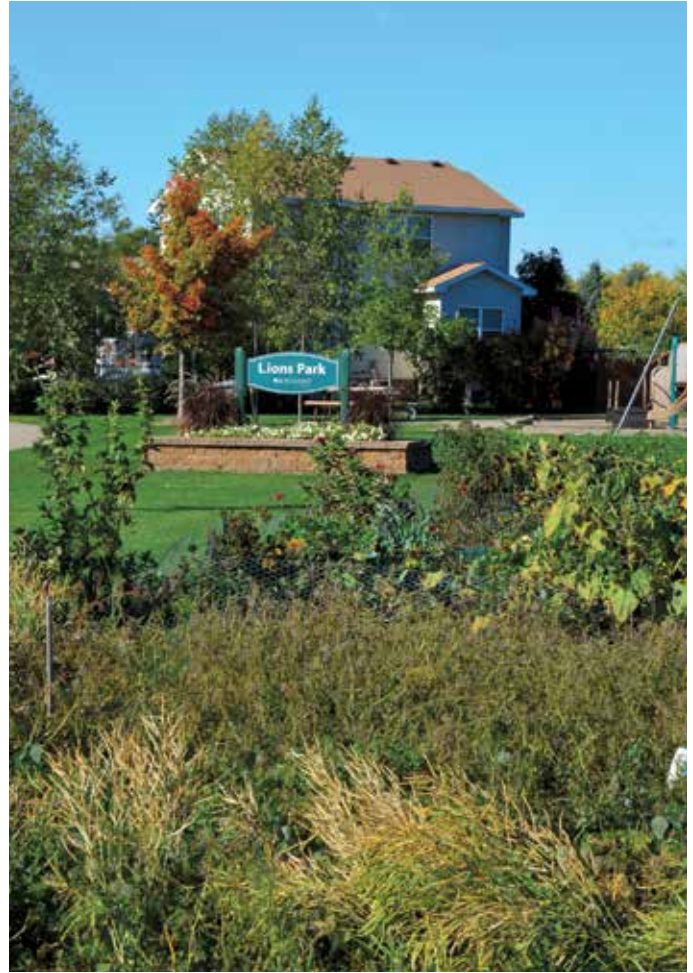
Communities throughout Minnesota and their residents are in a position to protect the natural environment and its ability to support human life by working together to implement concepts of sustainability in their current activities, and long range planning practices. Planning for sustainability promotes 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:¹

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.



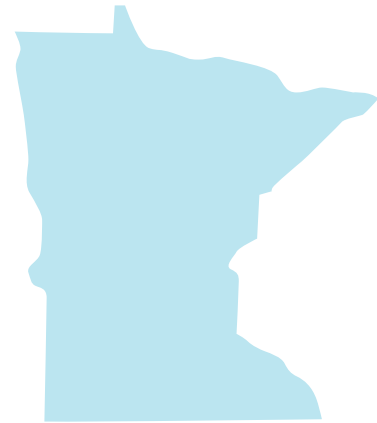
Cities throughout Minnesota are well placed to begin taking steps to ensure future residents will be able to live happy, healthy, productive lives.

Defining what sustainability means to them is one positive step communities could take. A clear, succinct, understandable definition is important for several reasons:

- 1** It provides a common language for all stakeholders interested in discussing and deciding the future of the City;
- 2** It creates an inclusive and dynamic process where all residents and leaders are included and opinions and ideas are valued;
- 3** It 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** It demonstrates the commitment of the City's citizens and leadership to improving social relations, economic health, and the environment; and
- 5** It 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. Sustainability can be defined and implemented in such 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.



**RESOLUTION ADOPTING A STRATEGIC DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABILITY
TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT, AND COMMUNITY
OF THE CITY OF:**

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 is a 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, the City 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.

WHEREAS, The Comprehensive Plan for the City 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 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 City Council adopts the strategic definition of Sustainability as attached in "Exhibit A." As such, the City 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 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 Definition

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:

1 | Maintaining and improving natural, economic, social, cultural, and political systems and resources for many generations.

2 | Fostering development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

3 | Promoting values that encourage development, and living standards that are within the bounds of the ecologically possible, and to which all can reasonably aspire.

4 | Persisting over generations and is future-oriented, flexible, and resilient.

5 | 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
<p>PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use energy, water, and other natural resources efficient 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.
<p>ENHANCE SOCIAL EQUITY</p>	<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.
<p>PROMOTE ECONOMIC SUCCESS</p>	<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 certain opportunities for culture, leisure, and recreation are readily available to all.

Exhibit A: Implementation Guidance

The following criteria are useful in determining if decisions are in the spirit of this definition ²

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:

- 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.

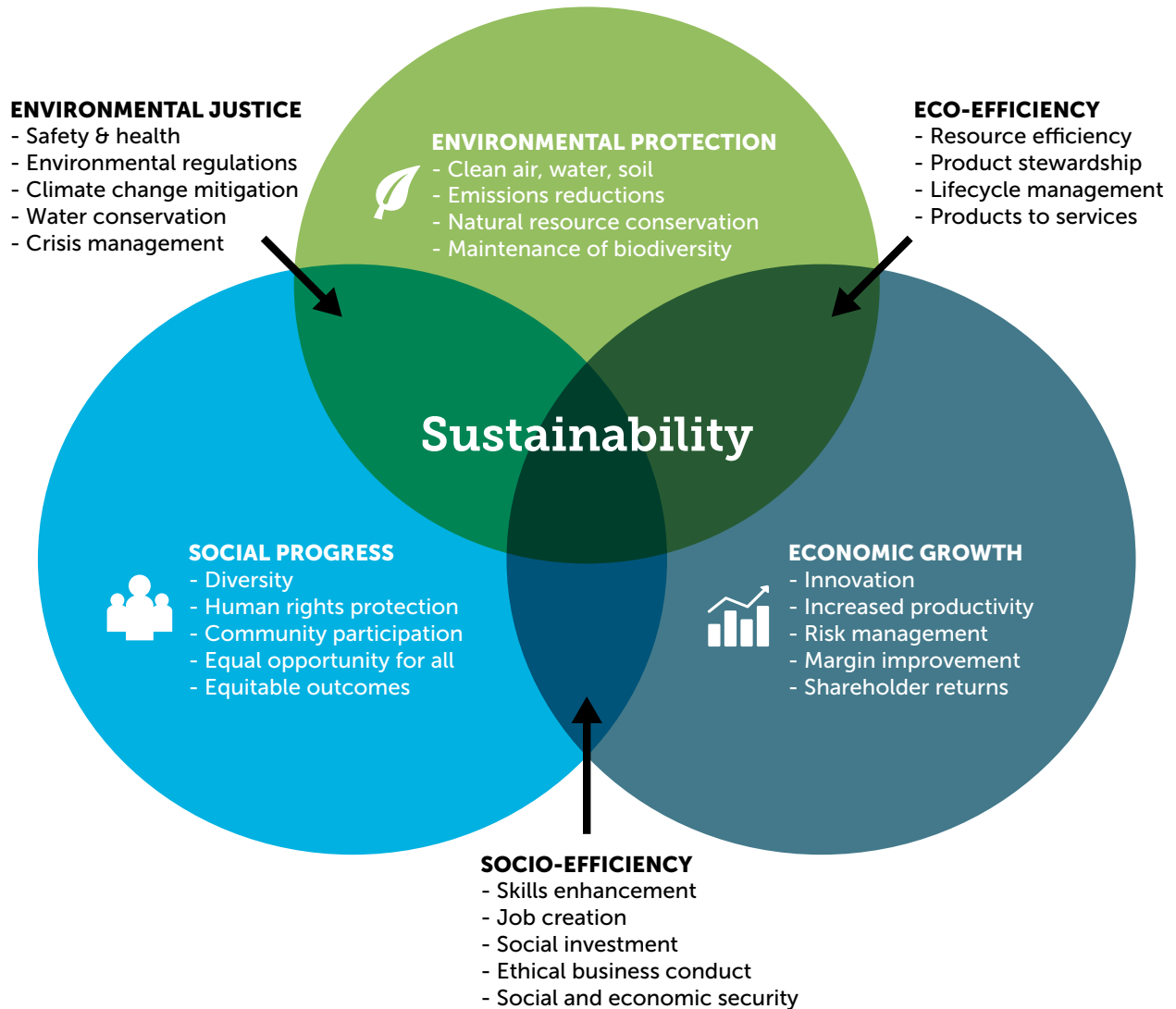
- For each alternative, describe what the community is like assuming the alternative has been fully funded and implemented consistently overtime.

AT THE RECOMMENDATION STAGE

Imagine that it is 100 years from now. You are analyzing the impacts of this policy or program 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 consideration.

Exhibit A: Sustainability Visualized



References

1. American Planning Association, *Policy Guide on Planning for Sustainability*, (2000)
available at <https://www.planning.org/policy/guides/pdf/sustainability.pdf>
2. Adapted from the City of Olympia Sustainability Resolution.

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