

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

A COMMITTEE REPORT OF THE ROUND TABLE
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The **Minnesota Round Table on Sustainable Development** is a diverse group of 30 business, environmental and community leaders appointed by Governor Arne H. Carlson to consider how Minnesotans can safeguard their long-term environmental, economic and social well-being. Their mission is to serve as a catalyst for sustainable development, to foster public and private partnerships and reach out to Minnesotans across the state, and to stimulate interest in and communicate the importance of achieving sustainable development. The Round Table is part of the **Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative**, launched in 1993 by Governor Carlson, the Environmental Quality Board and the commissioner of Trade and Economic Development, and coordinated by the Environmental Quality Board staff at Minnesota Planning.

This report was prepared by the Sustainable Communities Committee of the Minnesota Round Table on Sustainable Development, with help from Rolf Nordstrom, assistant director of the Round Table.

The report of the Land Use Committee is also included in this document. That report was originally published in September 1997 and was prepared with assistance from Susan Hass, a Round Table staff member.

On request, *Investing in Minnesota's Future: Sustainable Communities* will be made available in alternate format, such as Braille, large print or audio tape. For TTY, contact Minnesota Relay Service at 800-627-3529 and ask for Minnesota Planning.

For more information about the Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative, the Governor's Round Table on Sustainable Development or other sustainable development activities in Minnesota, please contact the Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative at:

MINNESOTA PLANNING ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY BOARD



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June 1998

This report is printed on 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper.



Investing in Minnesota's Future

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

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Summary

“We are beginning to think of our environment as a form of natural capital that we all inherited. We have been discussing what it might mean for communities to live only off the interest from this capital while leaving the principal intact to create new wealth for future generations.”

— SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES
COMMITTEE

Many Minnesotans understand that there can be no choosing between a prosperous economy, vital communities and a healthy environment. They want all three. According to a 1996 phone survey sponsored by the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance, 61 percent of 625 randomly selected respondents disagreed with the idea that Minnesota must ease some of its environmental protection policies to attract and keep good jobs and compete with other states.

When asked to describe what makes a high quality of life, more respondents mentioned a healthy environment as their top consideration than any other factor, followed by safety, financial security and health. When offered a brief definition of sustainable development, 76 percent felt it “very closely” or “somewhat closely” reflected their own views. Citizens are calling for more sustainable approaches to resource use and economic and community development.

From the diverse Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis to the famously chilly northern Minnesota town of Embarrass, cities, towns and counties are recognizing that their environmental, economic and social concerns are fundamentally interdependent. They are increasingly aware that commerce and all other forms of human activity depend on natural systems and natural resources, not the other way around. They are realizing that to degrade the environment is to diminish the true source of wealth.

Based on this same recognition, the Minnesota Round Table on Sustainable Development formed the Sustainable Communities Committee in order to learn from different communities what does and does not make them enduring places.

The committee established its mission as identifying and developing practical sustainable development tools for communities, and recommending to the Governor and Legislature ways to encourage sustainable development planning and implementation at the local level.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INVESTING NOW IN MINNESOTA’S FUTURE

No two places have exactly the same ecology, values, geography, businesses or cultures, so what is sustainable in one place may not be in another. The committee’s recommendations are not a one-size-fits-all approach for sustainable communities, but offer instead a handful of critical changes that could help Minnesota’s cities, towns and counties become more pleasant, economically prosperous, environmentally sustainable places to live and work:

Help communities meet their long-term environmental, economic and social needs by delivering state services in a more integrated way. For example: Develop a team approach to community assistance by supporting a sustainable community partnership modeled after the successful Minnesota Design Team. The partnership would provide multidisciplinary teams of private and public professionals to help interested communities implement and measure the results of sustainable development practices.

Provide a broad range of opportunities for learning about sustainable community concepts and practices. For example: Integrate sustainable development concepts into the curricula of primary and secondary schools, universities and technical schools so that students will be prepared to make better choices as citizens and consumers. Develop easy-to-use teaching materials that use sustainable development concepts to meet current graduation standards.

Identify, and publicly celebrate, successful sustainable community initiatives. For example: Establish a Governor’s Sustainable Community Award in cooperation with county, city and township associations. Award categories could honor outstanding neighborhood and community initiatives, as well as exemplary nonprofit, local business and state agency efforts.

Develop progress measures to track environmental, economic and social conditions and trends. For example: Engage communities in understanding and monitoring their economic, environmental and social health, and that of their neighbors, by developing model indicators and sharing information for their use.

“We need flexibility to create social structures that fit each community’s unique circumstances. We need leaders who are willing to sacrifice now for the future.”
— GRAND RAPIDS
FORUM PARTICIPANT

ALL DEVELOPMENT IS LOCAL; CONSEQUENCES SOMETIMES HAVE A WIDER REACH

One of the committee’s clearest conclusions is that all development, like politics, is local. How people choose to house themselves, use the land, travel, run their companies, and make, sell and purchase products — all these decisions are inherently local. Yet they can have profound consequences for Minnesota and the world at large. The collective results of local choices can affect the health of the local economy, whether or not a community shares a sense of place, and what sort of environment will be passed to the next generation.

Perhaps the best way to ensure that these individual decisions will add up to a sustainable community is to include all community interests in a local process that:

- Establishes a long-term community vision
- Describes the community’s environmental, economic and social conditions, trends and assets
- Produces short-term and long-term goals in these areas
- Establishes indicators to measure progress
- Produces implementation strategies and action steps for reaching the goals

The role of government in this cooperative effort is to serve as catalyst and facilitator, providing reliable information, guidance and technical assistance to communities that need and want it.

In the end, it will be individuals, through the choices they make in their personal and professional lives, who create a sustainable future. Individual involvement at home, in organizations and communities, and at the state level is critical.

This report is dedicated to improving the ability of Minnesota’s communities to manage change and improve conditions for their current and future residents. A measure of the document’s success will be the number of communities that begin using a model of progress that is restorative and sustainable.

About the Sustainable Communities Committee

“We need to recognize the basic relationship between the long-term health of the economy and the environment. It makes no more sense to have an economy that undermines the environment than it does to have environmental policies that ignore the economy’s health.”

— GOVERNOR

ARNE H. CARLSON

In January 1996, Governor Arne H. Carlson appointed 30 business, environmental and community leaders to the Minnesota Round Table on Sustainable Development. The Round Table’s charge was to identify for the Governor practical ways of achieving economic and community vitality while sustaining the quality of Minnesota’s environment.

The Round Table is a key state forum for promoting sustainable development in Minnesota. Its objectives are to increase public awareness about what sustainable development means, why it is necessary and what its benefits are; and to communicate to the Governor, Legislature and others practical information on ways to make and measure progress toward sustainable development, including policy recommendations where appropriate.

The Round Table represents the second phase of the Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative, a collaborative, statewide effort to make communities more livable and to create a strong, environmentally sound economy. The initiative is a partnership among business, civic interests and government dedicated to promoting Minnesota’s long-term well-being. In addition to providing forums for diverse interests to creatively think together, the Initiative conducts original policy research, coordinates sustainable development efforts among state agencies, provides practical assistance for community planning efforts and informs the public about sustainable development.

The Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative was launched in 1993 by Governor Carlson, the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, the Department of Trade and Economic Development and 105 citizens who charted more sustainable approaches to agriculture, energy, forestry, manufacturing, minerals use, recreation and human settlement. These seven original citizen teams identified long-range visions, principles, barriers and strategies in each of these issue areas.

LEARNING FROM COMMUNITIES

It is at the community level that many fundamental interconnections among environmental, economic and social issues become evident. The Round Table formed the Sustainable Communities Committee to learn from different communities what does and does not make them enduring places. The Committee’s seven members come from diverse backgrounds representing the experiences of both large and small businesses, non-profit organizations and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwa. A list of members is found on page 32. The Environmental Quality Board provided staff support.

The committee established its mission as identifying and developing practical sustainable development “tools” for communities, and recommending to the Governor and the Legislature ways to encourage sustainable development planning and implementation at the local level.

Principles

OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR MINNESOTA

The Minnesota Round Table on Sustainable Development offers five principles as guideposts along the path of sustainable development. They are:

1 Global interdependence. Economic prosperity, ecosystem health, liberty and justice are linked, and our long-term well-being depends on maintaining all four. Local decisions must be informed by their regional and global context.

2 Stewardship. Stewardship requires the recognition that we are all caretakers of the environment and economy for the benefit of present and future generations. We must balance the impacts of today's decisions with the needs of future generations.

3 Conservation. Minnesotans must maintain essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life-support systems of the environment; harvest renewable resources on a sustainable basis; and make wise and efficient use of our renewable and non-renewable resources.

4 Indicators. Minnesotans need to have and use clear goals and measurable indicators based on reliable information to guide public policies and private actions toward long-term economic prosperity, community vitality, cultural diversity and healthy ecosystems.

5 Shared responsibility. All Minnesotans accept responsibility for sustaining the environment and economy, with each being accountable for his or her decisions and actions, in a spirit of partnership and open cooperation. No entity has the right to shift the costs of its behavior to other individuals, communities, states, nations or future generations. Full-cost accounting is essential for assuring shared responsibility.



“Over the long run, a successful society is supported by both a healthy economy and a healthy environment, which, in turn, are supported by the health of the community. Each element is one critical leg that supports a three-legged stool. All three legs of the stool must be strong. Remove any of the three legs and the stool will soon collapse.”

Source: A Citizen's Guide to Achieving a Healthy Community, Economy and Environment, Center for Compatible Economic Development, The Nature Conservancy, Leesburg, Virginia, 1996. (Used with permission.)

**THE MINNESOTA
DESIGN TEAM**
*Started in 1983 by
Governor Rudy
Perpich,
entrepreneurial
landscape architects
and students of
landscape architecture,
the Minnesota Design
Team aimed to help
communities achieve
better planning and
design. Today the
Design Team is still
made up primarily of
landscape architects,
architects and
planners, but it also
draws on other
disciplines depending
on the needs of the
community. The team's
guiding precepts are
grassroots
involvement; an all-
volunteer organization
and process, including
the community host;
and the idea that good
design makes good
communities. The
Design Team gives
communities a design
framework within
which to collectively
imagine their desired
future.*

The Sustainable Communities Committee met from March 1997 through January 1998. While the members brought their own perspectives and expertise to the topic, their main activity was listening to, and learning from, the experiences of people in three representative communities and to those actively working in and with communities.

The committee's main tasks were to:

- Review the early work of the Sustainable Development Initiative's first citizen teams, summarized in the document *Redefining Progress: Working Toward a Sustainable Future*
- Gather information about the environmental, economic and social challenges that some Minnesota communities face in the next 50 years and beyond
- Identify barriers to sustainable community planning and implementation
- Identify and develop new tools to assist communities interested in sustainable development, including a list of characteristics of sustainable communities and model community indicators
- Develop recommendations for the Governor on ways to encourage sustainable community planning and implementation

Understanding that every place is different, the Sustainable Communities Committee visited three Minnesota communities: Grand Rapids, the Lyndale neighborhood of Minneapolis and St. Cloud. The committee hoped each community would provide insights into what changes, if any, would better facilitate long-term, whole-system planning at the local level, planning that recognizes the interdependence of environmental, economic and social conditions. The committee was impressed by how much work is already going on at the local level, yet struck that environmental, economic and social concerns are still often being dealt with separately.

In addition to these visits, the committee read some of the fast-growing body of literature on sustainable communities and heard from visiting speakers. One of those speakers, Janet Whitmore from the Minnesota Design Team, presented a collaborative, whole-system approach to community planning and design that led to the committee's top recommendation.

Finally, the Sustainable Communities Committee sponsored a survey of participants in six Sustainable Community Workshops organized by the Office of Environmental Assistance. Complete results from the six workshops can be found at www.seek.state.mn.us/sustain. A questionnaire distributed at each workshop asked three basic questions:

- What do you believe are the essential characteristics of a sustainable community?
- What, if anything, is a barrier to your community's sustaining its environment, economy and culture over time?
- What, if anything, would help your community become a more sustainable, enjoyable place to live?

The survey results raise many of the same issues that the committee heard about from its three host communities. It should be noted that survey respondents were self-selected and not a representative sample of Minnesota's population. Complete results from the questionnaire are available upon request.

Benefits of Sustainable Development

More and more Minnesota towns, cities and counties are recognizing the fundamental links between healthy communities, strong local economies and the ecological systems that support both. Places as different as Two Harbors and the Hamline-Midway neighborhood in St. Paul are planning for and integrating goals relating to such things as food and agriculture, energy and resource use, transportation, ecological and human health, business success, the built environment, community character and quality of life.

Sustainable development offers an alternative to choosing between good jobs, prosperous communities and a healthy environment. It involves using resources, making investments, creating technology and running organizations in ways that enhance a community's ability to meet its needs over the long term.

The Sustainable Communities Committee discovered compelling reasons for communities to work toward sustainability:

Sustainability aligns human activity with the physical laws that govern natural ecosystems. In order for the environment to support human activities over time, people and organizations need to make continuous progress on substantial changes. They need to meet more of their needs with renewable resources, use those renewable resources at a rate than can be sustained over time, use fewer toxic materials that build up in the environment, and use all resources as efficiently and fairly as possible.

Sustainability contributes to the health of the whole community. The goal of sustainability encourages communities to plan for and integrate goals relating to food and agriculture, energy and resource use, environmental quality, the built environment, business success, community character and quality of life. This helps avoid shifting problems from one sector to another or from one generation to another.

Sustainability saves money and improves the environment. Using sustainable approaches to energy, land use, building design, transportation and more can save communities money. It can reduce material and pollution costs and keep money circulating longer in the local economy as communities add value to local resources and meet local needs with local resources whenever possible.

Sustainability provides a common goal that can unify all members of the community. Business and religious leaders, concerned citizens and local officials can focus attention on the long-term health of the environment, economy and community, rather than on the concerns of one interest group.

Sustainability prevents problems rather than attempting to fix them after the fact. Some Minnesota communities are finding that it is more expensive to provide unplanned development with such things as roads, sewers, water and other utilities than it would have been had they decided in advance how and where they wanted growth and

development to take place. Developing in ways that are sustainable is generally cheaper in the long run.

Sustainability preserves the state's environmental wealth. That wealth includes a rich natural resource base, recreational opportunities and a diversity of life. Author Aldo Leopold has said that the first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts. The environment represents the building blocks for civilization itself.

In a 1996 phone survey sponsored by the Office of Environmental Assistance, Minnesotans were asked to describe what makes a high quality of life. Most mentioned a healthy environment as their top consideration, followed by safety, financial security and personal health.

Characteristics of Sustainable Communities

No two places have exactly the same ecology, values, geography, businesses or cultures. Yet there are some characteristics commonly found among communities that are sustainable places to live and work. The following observations emerged from the committee's conversations in host communities and from the experiences of other communities around the country.

Sustainable communities promote informed decision-making by ensuring that community plans and decisions are based on broad citizen participation; a comprehensive, up-to-date inventory of economic, environmental and social conditions and trends; and an understanding of the cumulative impacts of human activity.

Sustainable communities maintain natural and cultural assets by protecting, preserving and, as needed, restoring forests; surface and ground water; recreational, scenic and open areas; diversity of native species; agricultural land; significant historic and archeological sites; watersheds; and ecosystems.

Sustainable communities promote local and regional economic prosperity by adding value to local resources, keeping capital circulating within the local economy, supporting a diversity of new and existing local businesses, and helping all business enterprises use resources more efficiently (including land, energy, water and materials).

Sustainable communities promote a mutually supportive "ecosystem" of businesses by looking for opportunities to link businesses and organizations that may be able to use one another's waste energy or materials. This includes supporting business efforts to turn waste streams into profit streams. For example, Phenix Composites in Mankato combines lower grades of waste paper with soybeans to manufacture composite materials.

Sustainable communities account for the full environmental, social and economic costs of new development, including infrastructure costs such as transportation, sewers and waste water treatment, water, schools, recreation, open space and functioning ecosystems.

Sustainable communities plan, finance and provide public facilities and services in a timely, orderly and efficient way by guiding development toward areas with existing capacity. They ensure that facilities and services are in place when needed, based on the carrying capacity of the land.

Sustainable communities use energy-efficient, lowest-cost modes of travel such as walking, bicycling, telecommuting, rail, transit and clean-fuel vehicles.

Sustainable communities use physical resources in a way that can be sustained over time by asking critical questions about the flow of natural resources through the community:

- How will the community use and replenish renewable natural resources?
- How will the community use nonrenewable natural resources and eventually introduce substitutes?
- How will communities provide alternative job opportunities for those displaced by changes in resource use?
- How will the community minimize its overall energy use, maximize energy efficiency and employ Minnesota's renewable energy sources?
- How will the community optimize virgin resource use, reuse existing materials, use recycled and recyclable materials, and use wastes as feedstock or turn them safely back into soil?
- How will the community reduce reliance on persistent, toxic substances?
- How will the community maintain its irreplaceable ecological processes and biological diversity?

Sustainable communities promote livable communities using design principles including efficient land use; regional cooperation; integration of residential, commercial, civic, recreational and open spaces; access to job opportunities and housing for all income and age groups; a variety of appropriate transportation options; and safe, attractive public spaces.

Sustainable communities preserve community character by providing clear distinctions between development suitable for urban areas and rural environments.

These characteristics may not apply equally to all communities, but local leaders and citizens can use them to chart the future and promote sustainable development in Minnesota. Many of these characteristics are embodied in the goals of Minnesota's Community-Based Planning Act and will likely be topics of increasing interest as communities of all sizes grapple with how best to maintain a high quality of life for generations to come.

Measuring the Sustainability of a Community

“What gets measured tends to get done.

If you don’t measure results, you can’t tell success from failure.

If you can’t recognize success, you can’t

reward it or repeat it.

If you can’t recognize failure, you can’t learn from it.”

— MINNESOTA

MILESTONES, 1993

“Minnesotans need to have and use clear goals and measurable indicators, based on reliable information, to guide public policies and private actions toward long-term economic prosperity, community vitality, cultural diversity and healthy ecosystems.”

— PRINCIPLES

OF SUSTAINABLE

DEVELOPMENT

FOR MINNESOTA,

MINNESOTA ROUND

TABLE ON SUSTAINABLE

DEVELOPMENT

Indicators of sustainability tell a community how it is doing over time. They can serve as a canary in the mine, alerting citizens and policy-makers to troubling signs of environmental, economic or social decline. They can also provide a positive tool for tracking progress toward community goals. When developed in a collaborative way, indicators reflect collective values and can catalyze diverse interests into concerted action.

Ideas FOR MAKING A COMMUNITY MORE RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

- Inventory the “natural infrastructure” that determines much of the community’s economic base and quality of life, including water quality, air quality, soil, open spaces and natural areas. Decide how this infrastructure will be maintained over time.
- Upgrade lighting, heating, cooling and mechanical systems to take advantage of the most energy-efficient technology.
- Design buildings to conserve water, energy and materials. This might include solar technologies, closed-loop water and waste water systems, and building with used, recycled and recyclable materials.
- In building design, also consider reducing the need for travel, capturing solar energy and providing access to parks, businesses and other community services.
- Get youth involved in community service projects that have net environmental, economic and community benefits.
- Create forums in which people with very different backgrounds and perspectives can think together about the community’s future.
- Establish businesses that meet local needs with renewable, local resources (including those collected for recycling).
- Establish programs to reduce construction waste and link businesses that may be able to use one another’s waste products.

— Adapted from *The Rocky Mountain Institute*

The Minnesota Round Table on Sustainable Development concluded that because reliable measures of progress are so critical to achieving a sustainable economy and communities, it would propose the concept of "indicators" as one of five sustainable development principles Minnesota should adopt.

Indicators were also discussed in each of the communities the committee visited. For example, one Grand Rapids participant said, "We need indicators and benchmarks for sustainability. We need some goals, some desired future outcomes. We're not against development, but we want to know how much is too much. Science could help set some thresholds. There is a need for good information that is holistic rather than piecemeal."

In the Lyndale neighborhood of Minneapolis, residents are working on a Neighborhood Indicators Project that will provide an index of safety, home ownership, stability and investment within the community. As the Lyndale example suggests, each community will choose to track different things depending on its circumstances.

While there is no one right way to develop and track community indicators, one useful approach is described in *A Citizen's Guide to Achieving a Healthy Community, Economy and Environment*, published by the Center for Compatible Economic Development. This approach uses a "community balance sheet" in much the same way as a business might use a financial balance sheet to determine its overall health.

The balance sheet incorporates eight to 10 of the highest-priority components of environmental, economic and social "capital" chosen by the community. Community members regularly evaluate the status of each component, based on either quantitative or qualitative factors, and give each a score or letter grade. This set of evaluations provides an easily communicated report card or balance sheet on the relative sustainability of the community.

SAMPLE CATEGORIES FOR A COMMUNITY BALANCE SHEET

This list of general categories for indicators of community sustainability is not exhaustive. Drawing from community experiences and the literature, it suggests the range of concerns that could be tracked with indicators.

Environmental topics

- Air quality
- Diversity of species and habitat
- Hazardous waste
- Land preservation and use
- Nonrenewable resources
- Persistent, toxic pollutants
- Pollution prevention
- Renewable resources
- Resource consumption (water, food, energy, raw materials)
- Reuse and recycling
- Solid waste
- Water quality and quantity

BELLAGIO PRINCIPLES

In November 1996, an international group of measurement experts and researchers met in Bellagio, Italy, to review progress on sustainable development indicators and to synthesize insights from practical, ongoing efforts.

Participants unanimously endorsed a set of 10 principles, found on page 24.

Economic topics

Access to capital
Diversity of business sectors
Earnings and job quality
Economic vitality
Energy use and efficiency
Employment
Healthy agricultural sector
Imports and exports
Local value-adding activities
Population
Promising business sectors, based on local needs and resources
Resource capacity: human, financial, physical, technological and amenity
Small business development
Transportation
"Waste" exchange (waste from one activity becoming input for another activity)
Work force readiness

Social topics

Arts and culture
Attainable housing
Community celebrations
Community forums
Community leadership
Education
Governance
Health
Human services
Public safety
Recreational opportunities
Social equity and justice
Spirituality and religion

SELECTING INDICATORS

According to Maureen Hart, a nationally recognized expert on community indicators, successful indicator projects share at least three characteristics:

- The community creates a long-term vision, spanning decades or generations, that balances environmental, economic and social needs.
- The vision incorporates the views of a wide cross-section of the community.
- The community develops indicators to measure progress toward its vision.

The exact categories and specific indicators are probably less important than having the people who live in a place decide what is important to them and how to track the status of those things. Still, there are some common characteristics of good indicators.

A community could measure any number of things, from graduation rates and business start-ups to acres of forest land and energy use. Hart's national research suggests eight questions that may help communities decide whether a particular indicator is useful:

- Does the indicator measure something fundamental to the resilience and viability of the community?
- Is it understandable to the community at large?
- Has it been developed and accepted by the people of the community?
- Does it show fundamental links between the environmental, economic and social aspects of the community?
- Does it focus on the long term?
- Does it measure local sustainability, but not at the expense of some other place?
- Is it based on reliable information?
- Is it based on timely information that allows time to act?

Tracking economic activity alone means little without knowing how it is affecting people's lives or the environment's ability to provide resources, absorb wastes and support a rich diversity of life in the future.

SAMPLE INDICATORS

One of the important decisions communities must make about indicators is whether to communicate them in positive or negative terms. For example, is it more informative to say 80 percent of families live above the poverty line or 20 percent of families live at or below the poverty line? A community may decide that some indicators lend themselves to one approach better than another. The *Community Indicators Handbook*, developed by Sustainable Seattle, Redefining Progress and Tyler Norris Associates, suggests a number of indicators framed in positive terms:

- Bushels of food grown with no chemical fertilizers and pesticides
- Percentage of commuters traveling by foot, bicycle or public transit
- Amount of park land or green space per capita
- Percentage of people participating in neighborhood associations
- Percentage of people who have immediate neighbors of a different racial or ethnic background
- Percentage of population with access to a primary health care provider

The challenge is to find indicators that help people understand the fundamental links between healthy, functioning ecosystems, economic prosperity and social well-being. For example, rather than simply reporting the total amount of revenue generated by local businesses, a community might choose to track revenue per unit of waste.

MINNESOTA MILESTONES

Minnesota uses a set of progress indicators at the state level, as part of the *Minnesota Milestones* project at Minnesota Planning. *Minnesota Milestones* is a tool to help Minnesotans create the future they want for themselves and for their children and grandchildren. It lays out long-term goals for the state in key areas — the economy, the natural environment, community life, children and families, education, health and quality of government. It also takes periodic readings of the state's progress toward goals in each of these areas.

Begun by Governor Carlson in 1991 and involving more than a thousand citizens, *Minnesota Milestones* focuses on actual results, not just efforts or spending. It also creates some long-term accountability beyond the immediate priorities of legislative sessions, terms of elected officials and the state's two-year budget cycle.

“The Planning and Annexation Law is outdated. Cities should be encouraged to plan for growth for which they will ultimately become responsible.”

— GRAND RAPIDS
PARTICIPANT

“We need to draw an urban service boundary around our cities based on how large an area we can realistically serve.

[Anything] outside that boundary should be rural.”

— GRAND RAPIDS
PARTICIPANT

Minnesota Milestones is being revised to create stronger links to indicators being used by other local, state and national groups. The 1998 edition will include new indicators that better show the connection of the state's long-term environmental, economic and social well-being. The following goals are taken from the public review draft published in February 1998.

Minnesota Milestones environmental goals

- Minnesotans will conserve natural resources to give future generations a healthy environment and a strong economy.
- Minnesotans will improve the quality of the air, water and earth.
- Minnesotans will restore and maintain healthy ecosystems that support diverse plants and wildlife.
- Minnesotans will have opportunities to enjoy the state's natural resources.

Minnesota Milestones economic goals

- Minnesota will have sustainable, strong economic growth.
- Minnesota's work force will have the education and training to make the state a leader in the global economy.
- All Minnesotans will have the economic means to maintain a reasonable standard of living.
- All Minnesotans will have decent, safe and affordable housing.
- Rural areas, small cities and urban neighborhoods throughout the state will be economically viable places for people to live and work.

Minnesota Milestones social goals

- Our children will not live in poverty.
- Families will provide a stable, supportive environment for their children.
- All children will be healthy and start school ready to learn.
- Minnesotans will excel in basic and challenging academic skills and knowledge.
- Minnesotans will be healthy.
- Our communities will be safe, friendly and caring.
- People who need help providing for themselves will receive the help they need.
- People with disabilities will participate in society.
- People of all races, cultures and ethnicities will be respected and participate fully in Minnesota's communities and economy.

To learn more about *Minnesota Milestones*, call Minnesota Planning at 612-296-3985, e-mail milestones@mnplan.state.mn.us or visit the World Wide Web site at www.mnplan.state.mn.us.

Barriers to Sustainable Communities

The following circumstances are most in need of change to allow Minnesota communities to move more easily toward sustainability.

People often have a short-term, single-issue approach to solving problems.

Economic, environmental and social issues are often addressed as separate issues by government, businesses and nonprofit organizations. Community funding programs from the state are compartmentalized, each with their own requirements, yet communities often need coordinated assistance from all of them to be successful. The Legislature, many state agencies and local governments could do a better job of encouraging long-term, integrated, “whole-system” approaches to policies and programs. By funding and mandating narrowly prescribed or single-issue initiatives, the Legislature and local governments may contribute to a policy structure that restricts collaboration among programs and agencies.

Communities and citizens often lack access to relevant information. For instance, the cost of geographic information systems is too high for many communities, including the cost of training people to use them. Minnesota lacks concrete information about the economic, environmental and social costs of current growth and development patterns and what drives those patterns. The information that does exist is fragmented and often not collected the same way year to year. The state does not always disseminate all available information in a form people can use.

State financial incentives often do not encourage sustainable development.

Local government aid, tax-increment financing and many state grant and loan programs could do more to promote sustainability.

Community residents often lack information about zoning practices and community design principles. For example, Janet Whitmore of the Minnesota Design Team noted that most zoning ordinances adopted in the 1970s appear to be the work of a national zoning consultant. The ordinances may not be customized for the community that adopted them. People often do not realize that they can change their zoning to guide the kind of development they want and where it should happen.

The process of community design often does not include enough community members. Yet it is residents who are best able to define what they would like their community to be like.

People often do not understand the role of infrastructure and utilities in the long-term viability of their community. Whether the issue is squabbles over jurisdictional lines, city-versus-township disputes, failing septic systems or the capacity limits of wastewater systems in small towns, many people lack information about how these issues affect the environment, their pocketbook and the coherent development of their community.

“We need a pragmatic, equitable tax structure that rewards sustainable activities and punishes the reverse. For example, people with large tracts of land should have incentives to hold onto those. At a minimum we should eliminate the disincentives to hold onto them.”

— GRAND RAPIDS PARTICIPANT

“The Planning and Annexation Law is outdated. Cities should be encouraged to plan for growth for which they will ultimately become responsible.”

— GRAND RAPIDS PARTICIPANT

“We need to draw an urban service boundary around our cities based on how large an area we can realistically serve. [Anything] outside that boundary should be rural.”

— GRAND RAPIDS PARTICIPANT

“Exclusionary thinking” is often at the heart of community problems. There is often an “us versus them” attitude that may exclude certain groups or points of view from decisions about the community’s future. Alternative dispute resolution techniques such as facilitation, mediation and arbitration are underused in the planning process.

Communities often lack sufficient resources. Good community planning and design often require more money and technical expertise than many communities have at their disposal.

Different levels of local authority and the sheer number of governmental units can make it difficult to develop integrated solutions to complex problems. An atmosphere of distrust arising from a history of disputes, either within or between communities, often exacerbates this.

Recommendations for Fostering Sustainable Communities

Sustainable communities can perhaps best be achieved through collaboration among citizens, businesses, civic groups and government. When diverse interests come together, they can often come up with creative solutions.

For government to play a constructive role in this collaboration, it needs to serve less as an enforcer than as a catalyst and facilitator of cooperative efforts. Regulations must provide minimum standards for such things as environmental protection and public safety, but they should not impede continuous improvement, nor should they be the first choice for solving all problems.

Governments at every level should contribute their resources and expertise to collaborative community problem-solving. Toward that end, many of the committee’s recommendations are aimed at improving the relationship between communities and governments, particularly state government. This is not because government is the main actor, but because in some ways it needs to catch up with, and support, innovative approaches already underway.

Perhaps the committee’s most important recommendation for government is that leading public officials continue to champion a sustainable approach to resource use and economic and community development. Making the shift toward more sustainable forms of development requires a long-term commitment.

The following recommendations emphasize the need for government to support implementation of community initiatives and “early adopters” of sustainable practices to increase their chances of success.

Recommendation 1:

Help communities meet their long-term environmental, economic and social needs by delivering state services in a more integrated way.

Develop a team approach to community assistance by supporting the newly formed Sustainable Community Partnership, modeled after the successful Minnesota Design Team. The partnership includes private and public professionals from a range of disciplines. These professionals will provide interested communities with customized services including:

- Community assessments that help residents and officials identify their environmental, economic and social assets and liabilities
- Training in sustainable development concepts and practices
- Training in alternative dispute resolution techniques, including mediation, facilitation and arbitration, early in the community planning and development process
- Facilitation of citizen-based planning related to food and agriculture, energy and resource use, environmental quality, economic development, transportation, community character and design, the built environment, education, progress indicators, and overall quality of life
- Information, technical and financial resources to help communities reach their goals in areas including:

- Economic development
- Business assistance
- Social services planning
- Land use and transportation
- Energy use and conservation
- Renewable energy
- Architecture and building materials
- Natural resource management
- Community planning, design and implementation
- Pollution prevention
- Sustainable development education
- Waste management
- Alternative dispute resolution options
- Agriculture
- Geographic information system training and services

- Ongoing technical support, ideas and assistance with implementation of community plans

Adequately fund implementation of the sustainable community planning framework codified in the Community-Based Planning Act of 1997 and dedicate the bulk of the funds for assisting communities with implementation. Communities should be encouraged to update their plans at least every five years.

Give state agencies the flexibility to use their funding to support community initiatives that simultaneously address environmental, economic and social issues. Communities should be able to use a single application process to access the various types of assistance provided by the state. The Legislature should reward state agencies based on outcomes rather than adherence to program rules. Such integrated community assistance could reward holistic approaches to social, economic and environmental challenges at the local and state levels.

“Many of our problems are the result of fractured government.”

— GRAND RAPIDS PARTICIPANT

“Students graduate without knowing how to think in whole systems, how to find connections, how to ask big questions, and how to separate the trivial from the important. Now more than ever, however, we need people who think broadly and who understand systems, connections, patterns, and root causes.”

— DAVID ORR,
PROFESSOR OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
STUDIES, OBERLIN
COLLEGE

Redirect a percentage of current environmental, economic and community funding toward collaborative community initiatives that have net environmental, economic and social benefits. This should include developing an easy-to-understand directory of all state requirements for local planning.

Give priority for sustainable development funding to communities that:

- Use a sustainable community planning process that is participatory and community-based and that contributes to long-term environmental, economic and social health
- Have strong local leadership
- Commit to engaging the range of interests represented in the community (such as local business, foundation, religious, civic and environmental interests)
- Are willing to match state money, either financially or in kind
- Have urgent community concerns
- Show strong potential for success
- Have a history of successful community participation
- Commit to describing the community’s environmental, economic, social and cultural conditions and trends
- Commit to developing a community vision for the future and to developing environmental, economic, social and cultural goals
- Commit to using indicators to measure progress
- Commit to coordinating with affected neighboring governments to ensure compatibility among local visions and plans
- Commit to documenting the planning process, including through photos or video, so that others may learn from it

Recommendation 2:

Provide a broad range of formal and informal opportunities for learning about sustainable community concepts and practices.

In practice, this means offering opportunities for lifelong learning based on interdisciplinary approaches, systems thinking and empowering individuals to make informed choices.

Incorporate sustainable development concepts, principles and case studies into education. Reaching the next generation of community planners at both the graduate and professional graduate levels should be a priority. At the kindergarten through 12th-grade level, develop sustainable development criteria for “service learning” opportunities — school credit for service projects that offer net environmental, economic and community benefits.

Help teachers use sustainable development concepts to meet graduation standards by developing easy-to-use teaching materials. All disciplines should strive to make students aware of the connections between social and economic prosperity and healthy ecosystems.

Work with chambers of commerce, economic development associations and other business organizations to incorporate sustainable development concepts into their education and assistance programs.

Provide sustainable development training for all elected and appointed officials. Organizations such as the National Association of Counties and the Joint Center for

Sustainable Communities are already providing some of this training. Minnesota organizations, such as those representing cities, towns, counties and watershed districts, regularly conduct workshops for their members. Work with these organizations to incorporate information about sustainable development concepts and practices into their training programs.

Provide community presentations on the principles of sustainable development planning. Using the Minnesota Design Team model, make general presentations to communities around the state regarding planning for sustainable development. Work with local media to publicize sustainable development presentations and forums around the state.

Incorporate sustainable development concepts into legislative forums. During interim legislative sessions, conduct sustainable development forums, under the auspices of appropriate legislative committees, as part of the Legislature's road tours.

Develop an effective marketing and communications campaign to spread information about sustainable community concepts, examples and practices. Work with print and broadcast media to broaden awareness and discussion.

Recommendation 3:

Publicly celebrate sustainable community successes.

Establish a Governor's Sustainable Community Award in cooperation with county, city and township associations. Award categories could be for outstanding neighborhood and community initiatives, and for exemplary non-profit, local business and state agency efforts. This special recognition would go to those making simultaneous, continuous improvement in environmental, economic and social conditions.

Establish a system for tracking sustainable community efforts so that their results can be documented and shared.

Recommendation 4:

Develop progress measures to track environmental, economic and social conditions and trends.

Monitor and regularly update *Minnesota Milestones*, the state's long-range plan and progress indicators, to ensure that it measures long-term environmental, economic and social health.

Continue to work with diverse interests to develop new indicators for *Minnesota Milestones* that better show the relationships between environmental, economic and social conditions and help decision-makers better understand their interconnections.

Collect the data needed to support new *Minnesota Milestones* indicators.

Provide interested counties, cities and towns with the data, training and resources to develop their own measures of environmental, economic and community progress.

Stowe School in Duluth educates students on the requirements of sustainable living. Since 1994, the school has integrated environmental themes into every discipline. As a tangible side benefit, the school has reduced its solid waste by 84 tons a year and saves \$6,800 annually.

Internet Resources

- Business for Social Responsibility, www.bsr.org
- Center for Community Studies,
www.stcloudstate.edu/~cs/index.html
- Center of Excellence for Sustainable Development, www.sustainable.doe.gov
- Center for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technologies, <http://solstice.crest.org>
- Center for Sustainable Communities, <http://weber.u.washington.edu>
- Community Indicators Program,
www.coopamerica.org/isf/SCP.htm
- Co-op America, www.coopamerica.org
- GreenClips (sustainable development examples),
<http://solstice.crest.org/sustainable/greenclips/info.html>
- Green Institute, www.greeninstitute.org
- Indicators of Sustainable Development,
www.subjectmatters.com/indicators
- Institute for Local Self Reliance, www.ilsr.org
- International Chamber of Commerce,
www.iccwbo.org/
- International Institute for Sustainable Development, <http://iisd.ca>
- Joint Center for Sustainable Communities,
www.naco.org/members/index.htm
- Minnesota Internet Center,
www.internetcenter.state.mn.us
- Minnesota Rebuilds, <http://krypton.mankato.msus.edu/~tony/mnrebuilds/welcome.html>
- Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative,
www.mnplan.state.mn.us
- Office of Environmental Assistance,
www.moea.state.mn.us
- President's Council on Sustainable Development,
www.whitehouse.gov/PCSD
- Racine, Wisconsin, www.racinecounty.com/sc/letter.htm
- RenewAmerica, http://solstice.crest.org/renew_america
- The Rocky Mountain Institute, www.rmi.org
- Sustainable Business Network,
www.envirolink.org/sbn
- Sustainable Communities, www.indigodev.com
- Sustainable Communities Network,
www.sustainable.org
- Sustainable Communities (Wingspread Journal),
www.ncl.org/anr/suscom.htm
- World Business Council on Sustainable Development, www.wbcscd.ch

Committee Members and Participants

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Melanie Benjamin, representative, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwa

Steve Erdall (advisor), president, Western State Bank

Nelson French (Round Table co-chair), executive director, Friends of the Minnesota Valley; former director, Nature Conservancy; co-chair, Minerals Team, Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative

Diane Lynch, district administrator, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District

Allison Rajala, president, True North Public Relations

Anita Ryan (Round Table co-chair), principal, C. McFarlane Associates; co-owner, St. Paul Brass and Aluminum; member, Manufacturing Team, Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative

Annie Young (committee chair), associate director, the Green Institute; community activist and resident, Phillips Neighborhood, Minneapolis; citywide at-large commissioner, Minneapolis Park Board

Bob Bringer (special advisor), emeritus executive, 3M; liaison, World Business Council on Sustainable Development; member, Natural Resources Task Force, President's Council on Sustainable Development; former chairman, Corporate Conservation Council, National Wildlife Federation; co-chair, Manufacturing Team, Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative

ST. CLOUD PANEL

Arthur Mehrhoff, professor, St. Cloud State University

Pam Mittlefehldt, director, Center for Community Studies, St. Cloud State University

Bill Hanson, St. Cloud Area Planning Organization

Jane Bennett, League of Women Voters and St. Cloud Environmental Task Force

Tony Goddard, St. Cloud Area Economic Development Partnership

Linda Peck, farmer and field biologist representing Sierra Club's Big River Group

Steve Bresnahan, co-chair, Great River Round Table

Rose Arnold, commissioner, Stearns County (Collegeville Township)

GRAND RAPIDS PANEL

Mary Kay Jacobson, executive director, Northern Minnesota Citizens League

Chad Haadvedt, community development director, City of Grand Rapids

Kathleen Preece, wildlife biologist and writer

Art Norton, water plan coordinator, Itasca County

John Rajala, president, Rajala Lumber Company

LYNDALE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION PANEL

Kata Novak, vice president, LNA

John Meegan, treasurer, Lyndale Neighborhood Development Corporation

Joseph Barisonzi, executive coordinator, LNA

Margaret Wunderlich, treasurer, LNA

Bruce Westphal, pastor, Zion Lutheran Church

Gerry Flemming, chair, LNA Personnel Committee; member, LNA Steering Committee

Terri Velmond, member, LNA Youth and Family Committee

Steve Lick, member, LNA Steering Committee

Sam Nero, pastor, New Life Christian Ministry

Charles Hall, community volunteer

Josephina Cabellero, participant, LNA Language Exchange Program

Harry Jensen, executive director, Lyndale Neighborhood Development Corporation

Steve Frenz, rental property owner, Lyndale neighborhood

OTHER SPEAKERS

Janet Whitmore, Minnesota Design Team

Bill Poppert, Energy Alley

Diane Wanner and **Garth Hickle**, Sustainable Communities Team, Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance

Joe Barisonzi, Lyndale Neighborhood Association

Summaries of Community Forums

The Round Table held three community listening forums. These summaries reflect the thoughts and concerns of participants and do not necessarily represent the Round Table's views.

“We need a different model for development.

How do we reapportion benefits between present and future generations?”

— GRAND RAPIDS

PARTICIPANT

GRAND RAPIDS

Grand Rapids and the surrounding region have high unemployment — 10.3 percent. Farming has declined and there is a need to diversify the local and regional economy beyond forestry, government, recreation and mining. Tourism is driving much of the area's growth. With a K-Mart, Target and Wal-Mart in a town of fewer than 8,000 people, Grand Rapids has a hard time supporting small shops. Potential for information technology is high, but so is the need for more high-technology training. By contrast, there is a lot of skilled labor in the construction industry.

The region also needs better ways to fund social services. As a town of fewer than 8,000 people, Grand Rapids serves a region of 40,000. The population has grown about 5 percent since 1980, making housing and rural health care big issues. Poverty is a serious, but often hidden, problem. Like many other parts of Minnesota, the community is graying. Planning for how best to meet residents' needs is complicated by the fact that many people leave during the winter, causing large fluctuations in population. Grand Rapids has turned down four bond issues in a row that would have increased education spending. The region continues to lose talented young people to the larger cities, though a good number also stay.

Some of the key environmental issues are water quality, forest stewardship and land use. Itasca County has almost 1,000 lakes. As in the state as a whole, those lakes hold special meaning for the people who depend on them. The region has good water quality and a strong commitment to sustaining it. The most pressing question the area faces is how to manage development. Over 30 lake associations have formed (more than half within the last five years) due to concerns over lakeshore development.

As for forests, most forest landowners share three common desires: to preserve beauty, sustain the land for their children and grandchildren, and protect well water. Given that less than 20 percent of the 6.1 million acres of privately held forested lands in Minnesota have forest management plans, there is a need for trained professionals to help people make informed decisions about how to reforest their land. Achieving sustainable forestry will require matching a landscape perspective with landowner goals.

With respect to land use, the former community development director states that the region needs to have a plan for the future before growth and development take place.

Other recommendations related to land use included:

- The state needs to help with a more fair and equitable tax system (perhaps allowing local governments to implement a sales tax to help pay for local services).
- Cities need the ability to plan within potential growth areas.
- The state should work to resolve disputes among cities over economic development. Without a statewide approach, such fighting only moves the economic pieces around without creating net benefits for the state.

LYNDALE NEIGHBORHOOD, MINNEAPOLIS

Representatives from the Lyndale neighborhood and its association made a presentation to the Round Table covering Lyndale's history, vision, mission, values and the process of community-building in which they have engaged.

Although some of the issues that Lyndale residents care most about are different from those described in Grand Rapids, this diverse Minneapolis neighborhood has lessons about community building that are relevant for many communities.

Lyndale's keys to building a sustainable community:

- Establish a vision and focus on a well-defined mission, including goals, objectives and strategies. Develop community indicators to measure progress.
- Involve people in the doing. Consider community residents as the main resource for solving community problems.
- Retain and build social capital — bonds and relationships among people. According to one Lyndale presenter, this is the basis for all other forms of capital. Our money system works because of trust among its users that a paper dollar will buy a dollar's worth of goods or services. Activities that build social capital (neighborliness, community events, volunteerism) accrue "interest" and cause a multiplier effect just like financial capital does. That is, positive community stories and actions have an impact well beyond the individual event. For instance, a Lyndale resident told of having an accident far from home and the neighborhood rallying to help her get home.
- Retain financial capital. The banking and insurance environment has been very difficult in Lyndale; the neighborhood has had to rely on investors with considerable personal wealth.
- Keep the community plan flexible. The plan is revised to accommodate those things people in the community actually want to do. Creativity and vision have been allowed to flourish. This, in turn, has created an environment that attracts capital.
- Measure what the community cares about. The Lyndale Neighborhood Association is working on a Neighborhood Indicators Project that will provide an index of safety, ownership, stability and investment within the community.

*"We are investing in
our future, in ourselves
and in our
neighborhood."*

— LYNDALE PARTICIPANT

ST. CLOUD

St. Cloud is unique because it is situated at the junction of three counties (Sherburne, Benton and Stearns), but it is also representative of many areas in Minnesota's "growth crescent," which reaches down through the Twin Cities to Rochester. People in many other parts of the state would identify with the challenges St. Cloud faces in managing growth.

These challenges include:

- The number of local governmental units and the political complexities they represent
- A history of disputes and a lack of experience with collaborative approaches and alternative dispute resolution
- The difficulty of involving all relevant stakeholders in the comprehensive planning process due to the time, money and facilitation skills required
- The difficulty of translating good information into good decisions and sustainable outcomes
- Fear that change will lower the quality of life
- No shared understanding of how sustainable development could improve environmental, economic and social conditions and bring people together
- A lack of readily available ecological, biological, hydrological and geological data
- People working on different aspects of a sustainable community — environmental protection, well-paying jobs, community participation, volunteerism — but working on them as separate issues
- Academic institutions that might assist sustainable community efforts but seem somewhat disconnected from what goes on in the community
- Information overload

Bellagio Principles for Measuring Progress

The Bellagio Principles are guidelines for the practical assessment of progress toward sustainable development. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) called for the development of new ways to assess progress toward sustainable development.

An international group of measurement practitioners and researchers from five continents met in November 1996 at the Rockefeller Foundation's Study and Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy. After reviewing progress and synthesizing insights from ongoing measurement efforts, they unanimously endorsed 10 principles.

These principles serve as guidelines for choosing indicators and interpreting and communicating the results. The principles are interrelated and should be applied as a complete set.

The principles deal with four aspects of assessing progress toward sustainable development. Principle 1 deals with the starting point of any assessment — vision and goals, content, process, and continuity.

The following section directly quotes the principles and explanations adopted in Bellagio:

1. Guiding vision and goals

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should be guided by a clear vision of sustainable development and goals that define that vision.

2. Holistic perspective

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- Include review of the whole system as well as its parts
- Consider the well-being of social, ecological, and economic sub-systems, their state as well as the direction and rate of change of that state, of their component parts, and the interaction between parts
- Consider both positive and negative consequences of human activity, in a way that reflects the costs and benefits for human and ecological systems, in monetary and non-monetary terms

3. Essential elements

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- Consider equity and disparity within the current population and between present and future generations, dealing with such concerns as resource use, over-consumption and poverty, human rights, and access to services, as appropriate
- Consider the ecological conditions on which life depends
- Consider economic development and other, non-market activities that contribute to human and social well-being

4. Adequate scope

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- Adopt a time horizon long enough to capture both human and ecosystem time scales, thus responding to needs of future generations as well as those current to short term decision-making

- Define the space of study large enough to include not only local but also long-distance impacts on people and ecosystems
- Build on historic and current conditions to anticipate future conditions — where we want to go, where we could go

5. Practical focus

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should be based on:

- An explicit set of categories or an organizing framework that links vision and goals to indicators and assessment criteria
- A limited number of key issues for analysis
- A limited number of indicators or indicator combinations to provide a clearer signal of progress
- Standardizing measurement wherever possible to permit comparison
- Comparing indicator values to targets, reference values, ranges, thresholds, or direction of trends, as appropriate

6. Openness

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- Make the methods and data that are used accessible to all
- Make explicit all judgments, assumptions, and uncertainties in data and interpretations

7. Effective communication

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- Be designed to address the needs of the audience and set of users
- Draw from indicators and other tools that are stimulating and serve to engage decision-makers
- Aim, from the outset, for simplicity in structure and use of clear and plain language

8. Broad participation

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- Obtain broad representation of key grass-roots, professional, technical and social groups, including youth, women, and indigenous people, to ensure recognition of diverse and changing values
- Ensure the participation of decision-makers to secure a firm link to adopted policies and resulting action

9. Ongoing assessment

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- Develop a capacity for repeated measurement to determine trends
- Be iterative, adaptive, and responsive to change and uncertainty because systems are complex and change frequently
- Adjust goals, frameworks, and indicators as new insights are gained
- Promote development of collective learning and feedback to decision-making

10. Institutional capacity

Continuity of assessing progress toward sustainable development should be assured by:

- Clearly assigning responsibility and providing ongoing support in the decision-making process
- Providing institutional capacity for data collection, maintenance, and documentation
- Supporting development of local assessment capacity

Report of the Land Use Committee

Active, meaningful community planning balances individual, business and public interests; it invests in a long-term sustainable future for the community, its neighbors and the state as a whole. This is the vision adopted in April 1997 by the 10-member Land Use Committee of the Minnesota Round Table on Sustainable Development.

The committee examined local planning in Minnesota, considered alternative approaches and proposed a new approach — citizen-based planning for sustainable communities. The Round Table first issued this report in September 1997.

Some elements of the committee's proposal are included in the Community-Based Planning Act, signed by Governor Carlson in May 1997, and other issues identified here may be addressed in the implementation of the new law.

CURRENT APPROACH FALLS SHORT

Minnesota's current approach to planning is piecemeal and uncoordinated. Many communities are unprepared to plan for growth and change. A variety of problems needs to be addressed if a sustainable future is to be attained:

- The true economic, environmental and social costs of development are often unclear, unidentified and not reflected in decision-making.
- State regulations, requirements and assistance are often too narrowly focused, addressing only individual programs and needs.
- Communities are increasingly asked to do more with shrinking federal and state dollars.
- A lack of planning and orderly development lead to an unpredictable need for public expenditures and wide fluctuations in costs.
- Minnesota's wealth of natural resources is shrinking. For example, Minnesota today has only 1 percent of its original prairie, 0.1 percent of its portion of the original Big Woods, which stretched from northwest Illinois to northwest Minnesota, and 58 percent of its original wetlands.
- The use of septic systems is leading to serious and widespread ground water contamination.
- Citizens often do not participate in planning for the future of their communities. Opportunities for citizen participation are limited and difficult for many people to take advantage of.
- Minnesota's communities lack resources and information for integrated planning and decision-making.
- Consensus is lacking on how growth on the fringe of urban areas should be governed.

NEW APPROACH OFFERS SOLUTIONS

Resolving these problems will best be done through citizen-based planning for sustainable communities. This planning would use sustainable development goals, principles and guidelines; technical and financial assistance; dispute resolution guidance; and regional and state agency participation to help communities envision and pursue futures that they desire and the state can afford. Steps toward this future would include:

- **Using common goals, principles and guidelines to move toward sustainable development.** The Sustainable Economic Development and Environmental Protection Task Force in 1995 identified a set of goals that could be codified as the basis for community planning. These are listed in the “Goals for Sustainable Community Development” on page 29.
- **Developing outcome-based guidelines to implement the goals.** Organizations such as Minnesota Planning and the Round Table on Sustainable Development could develop recommended planning guidelines incorporating input from around the state. Guidelines would be measurable and clear yet flexible enough to encourage innovation and respect regional diversity. This step also would include designing methods communities could use to evaluate the costs of development alternatives and decide how to pay for them; establishing a grant program that would link existing grant sources; creating incentives for communities to consider ecosystems (living organisms and their environments), watersheds and other natural systems when planning; and developing ways to overcome other barriers to sustainable development.
- **Making community planning citizen-based.** Citizen participation and consensus building could be extensive and broadly representative, with communities encouraging participation by all of their members.
- **Basing land use plans on sustainable development principles.** Counties, cities and towns could create land use plans that integrate and simplify existing planning requirements, build on existing local initiatives and cover urban and rural development, environmental protection, agricultural land preservation, economic development, transportation, social well-being and infrastructure needs.

Based on principles adopted by the Minnesota Round Table on Sustainable Development in September 1996, these plans would designate areas for environmental and agricultural land preservation; ensure affordable housing; encourage development of densities higher than current practice for designated urban areas, including areas that are underused; and encourage cleanup and redevelopment of contaminated lands.

Plans would contain the basic elements of a vision, goals, principles, objectives and strategies, along with such information as a natural communities inventory, such tools as a community impact analysis, service standards and a capital facilities plan. Outcome-based planning guidelines would trigger a unique set of requirements based on local assets, needs and responsibilities as identified by the community. Each plan would have a checklist for demonstrating how and where goals and guidelines are addressed.

Multiple counties or other jurisdictions would collaborate under the joint powers law to form a single plan. Cities and towns would prepare plans in coordination with the county plan, recognizing common goals and policies while including more specific measures as needed. In effect, city and town plans would nest inside the county plan.

Counties would have a single deadline for planning that would precede those for city and town plans. Plans also would specify a schedule for adopting compatible official controls.

■ **Preserving productive agricultural land for the food and fiber needs of future generations.** Community plans would designate areas for permanent agricultural preservation.

■ **Integrating environmental, social and economic information to inform plans and decisions before plans are completed.** To help communities plan effectively, one or more state agencies in collaboration with regional and local agencies, educational institutions and private organizations would create and maintain a collection of economic, social and environmental information for use by communities.

■ **Giving communities incentives of resources, flexibility and authority to plan.** Plans would give counties, cities and towns the legal basis for official controls, a foundation for development decisions, some flexibility in state regulations and access to some state funds. Through their plan, these jurisdictions also would be able to demonstrate any need for priority status in state programs and investments. Counties would have the strongest incentives to plan.

In planning, communities would build their knowledge of the long-term costs of development along with a consensus on how to pay for them. Communities that plan could establish service standards that meet sustainable development goals and a fair and equitable system for development to pay its own way, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 429.

Legislatively established planning and implementation grants, as well as a consolidated sustainable development state grants program, would be incentives and would encourage innovation.

Communities also would have a wide variety of public- and private-sector resources to draw on for technical assistance; a database of these resources could be set up and maintained by a state agency.

■ **Coordinating planning among communities.** Planning grants would be issued after a county and its cities, towns and special districts including school districts and watershed districts draw up a coordinated work plan. Outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area, counties would take the lead in encouraging collaboration and coordination with cities, towns, neighboring counties, regional development commissions and special districts. Local jurisdictions would work together to ensure that their plans are compatible with each other and with natural systems, including hydrological, plant and wildlife communities.

■ **Coordinating planning with sovereign tribes.** The state would coordinate state, regional and community planning with the 11 American Indian tribes in Minnesota, respecting their status as sovereign nations.

■ **Supporting local planning efforts with regional and state planning.** State agencies and the Metropolitan Council would prepare plans to guide their own activities and programs in support of local sustainable development plans. The council and regional development commissions would give communities guidance on regional issues that would be compatible with the common goals and guidelines. The Metropolitan Urban Service Area line — the regional boundary for urban services drawn by the council — would be removed in each county as plans are approved designating where urban development would be encouraged.

■ **Seeking broad review and approval of community plans.** Neighboring jurisdictions, regional development commissions and the Metropolitan Council would review local plans. Minnesota Planning would coordinate a state-level plan review and approve plans outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. State agencies would be held accountable for developing and carrying out their programs and policies in agreement with the common goals and policies, and approved local plans.

■ **Providing a process for resolving disputes.** The Minnesota Office of Dispute Resolution, in consultation with other alternative dispute resolution organizations, would set up a process for resolving planning conflicts between cities, townships, counties, state agencies and citizens. This process would be used in conflicts involving a proposed plan's compatibility with state goals as well as the review and coordination of plans across jurisdictional boundaries.

■ **Giving communities the flexibility to respond to change.** Plan amendments and reviews would be done within specific time frames. Communities would publish their plan amendments once each year, so that the cumulative effects of changes could be seen, and plans would be reviewed regularly.

■ **Respecting private property rights and responsibilities.** The property rights of landowners would be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions. As established by the Minnesota Constitution, article I, section 13, "private property shall not be taken, destroyed or damaged for public use without just compensation, therefore, first paid or secured." Property owners are entitled to a reasonable return on use of their land, in accordance with U.S. and Minnesota constitutional requirements.

■ **Protecting vested interests.** Development projects that received permission to go forward before adoption of this planning approach would not be prohibited. After a comprehensive plan is approved, communities would have to justify amendments in regulations that were developed based on the approved plan.

GOALS FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The following goals were developed by the Sustainable Economic Development and Environmental Protection Task Force, a group that was created by the Minnesota Legislature in 1994 and concluded its work in 1995. The Land Use Committee adopted these goals as part of its final report.

Guide change through planning. Develop community visions for the future. Use incentive-based strategies, land use controls and infrastructure investments to clear a path for sustainable development.

Coordinate planning for compatibility. Guide and coordinate land use planning and community development with a common set of broad, long-term goals and policies that promote sustainable development in Minnesota. Coordinate plans to ensure compatibility with those of neighboring jurisdictions and with common goals.

Include citizens in planning and decision-making. Communities are storehouses of knowledge and resources. Provide easy, interesting opportunities for citizens to be involved in all phases of the planning process. Planning goals and guidelines must reflect the will and interests of citizens.

Respect and foster diversity among communities. Land use planning and community development must respect the vastly different needs, strengths and aspirations of Minnesota's communities and regions, and encourage the preservation of their unique character.

Use integrated information as a foundation for plans and decisions. Base planning and decision-making on a comprehensive, up-to-date inventory of local and statewide social, environmental and economic attributes and conditions. Communicate information in understandable, creative ways.

Consider the long-term social, economic and environmental costs of growth and development. Base decisions on a comprehensive analysis of the true costs of different development scenarios and on whether or not they are judged as sustainable over the long term.

Pay as we go. Promote paying the full environmental, social and economic costs imposed by new development, including infrastructure costs, such as transportation and recreation facilities, schools, sewers and water treatment. In achieving this goal, show preference for policies that respect differences across the state, are equitable and market-based, and enhance Minnesota's long-term competitiveness.

Use natural resources and public funds efficiently. Direct growth toward areas with existing capacity in infrastructure and services. Encourage development that uses land efficiently and appropriately for its ecosystem and the character of the surrounding community.

Preserve features of local, regional and statewide significance. Preserve valuable farmland, forests, open space and unique natural, historic, cultural, scenic and recreational resources.

Live within our means. Respect the limitations of the natural environment to support development by encouraging development that meets people's needs yet protects environmental quality and minimizes alteration of Minnesota's lands and waters.

Foster livable communities. Encourage safe, pedestrian-friendly development that integrates a diverse mix of housing and jobs, public transit, businesses, public spaces and recreational areas.

Enhance Minnesota's economic strength and competitiveness. Foster economic development that builds wealth within communities and utilizes Minnesota's natural and economic assets, such as prime farmland, on a sustainable basis.

Land Use Committee Members

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Barbara Lukermann, Co-chair; President, Citizens League; Professor of Land Planning, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota; Co-chair, Settlement Team, Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative

John Bowers, Retired Administrator, Federal Highway Administration

Chris Radatz, Legislative Policy Analyst, Minnesota Farm Bureau

Tom Cochrane, Director, AgriGrowth Council; Agriculture Team, Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative

Kathryn Draeger, President, Environmental Ground, Inc.

Ralph Lentz, Past Chairman, Minnesota Sustainable Farming Association; Agriculture Team, Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative

James Stanton, Chief Executive Officer, Shamrock Development, Inc.; Past President, Builders' Association of Minnesota; Past President, Minnesota Association of Realtors

Jonathan Wilmshurst, Regional President, CAMAS Minnesota Inc. (sand and gravel business); Minerals Team, Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative

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