

Theme: Sustainability

Why is “sustainability” a cross-chapter theme within this plan? Our region has been blessed with incredible beauty and natural resources. For generations, we have allowed the condition of our environment to slide. Will we be the generation to reverse that trend and leave the environment in better shape than we inherited it? If not us, then who? If not now, then when? In many cases, we only have one shot at preserving our incredible natural resources – let’s get it right the first time.

To address the theme of “sustainability,” we asked each of the citizen-based planning committees to consider how their committee’s recommendations support energy efficiency, recycling, low-impact construction, and other measures of sustainability.

The Strategic Plan Coordinating Committee, when asked to measure the inter-relationships between “sustainability” and the thirteen chapter topics, indicated the following (see Exhibit xx):

- Very strong relationship with Growth Management & Land Use, Housing, and the Natural Environment chapters
- Medium-strong relationship with Economic Development, Education & Workforce Development, Recreation & Leisure, and Transportation
- Moderate relationship with Early Childhood Development, Global Perspectives & Diversity, Progressive Management, Public Health, and Public Safety
- Weak relationship with Arts/Culture/Tourism

The very strong inter-relationship with our growth management and land use is readily apparent – how we use our land and how we grow our community will have a tremendous impact on our collective level of sustainability. “Green” initiatives within the City of Springfield, Greene County, City Utilities, and surrounding municipalities in our region will be the key to setting the tone. Will our metropolitan community be known as a “green” place to live, work, and play?

The very strong relationship with our natural environment is just as readily apparent. By definition, the natural environment and our community’s interaction with it, has everything to do with sustainability. As noted by the Natural Environment Planning Committee, “the investments called for within this document have returns measured in dollars, but also in more intangible and lasting measures of community health. The end result promises to be one of a substantially increased sense of community.”

There is obviously also a strong relationship between sustainability and our community’s future economic development. Not only will “green” jobs be more prevalent in the future, but many existing businesses will likely transition to more “green” practices. These trends, obviously, demand a workforce trained to possess these new types of skills. The educational and workforce strategies will foster stronger partnerships with the regional “green” initiatives with a goal of building new educational programs that lead to new career paths. Having a qualified workforce depends, in part,

on early childhood development efforts that position our citizens, over time, to become more employable. A qualified, local workforce is one of the first things a business evaluates when considering cities in which to locate.

Preservation of our parks and other recreational areas is vital. Let's face it . . . we take our high-quality parks for granted. However, they are one of the first things many visitors notice about our community. Tourism is a major economic driver within our community. A significant part of our tourism revolves around the incredible beauty of our natural environment. Maintaining that natural environment for future generations – managing our water sources and quality, preserving the beauty of our land, and keeping our air clean – will provide the Springfield area with a competitive advantage relative to those communities that ignore or abandon their natural surroundings. Our citizens' health and quality of life depend on stewardship of these resources.

Our future transportation infrastructure will greatly impact our level of sustainability. Will we achieve population densities during the next 20 years sufficient to support mass transit systems? Or will we rely on more efficient vehicles to allow the majority of citizens to continue to use independent transportation (personal cars and trucks). Mass transit on any significant scale requires population densities much greater than our current densities.

Sustainability can increase the economic, social, and environmental health of the region. We must educate our citizens about the linkage between increased sustainability and these many benefits. Museums that teach visitors about sustainability, the Springfield Regional Arts Council's rain barrel art project, and the Partnership for Sustainability's lightbulb exchange are examples of initiatives that need to be continued and ramped up. The Partnership for Sustainability must continue to take a leadership role in educating the community – businesses, non-profits, government entities, and individual citizens – about the benefits of sustainability.