

Sarasota County acknowledges that sustainability is an interlocking network comprised of everything a community touches. Its Roadmap to Sustainability holistically integrates environmental, societal and economic initiatives, fundamentally shifting the role that governance can play in building a sustainable community and transforming its identity.

The citizens and government of Sarasota County have demonstrated their commitment toward a leadership role in sustainability.

- First American county to sign the 2030 Challenge for carbon neutrality
- First local Florida government to gain LEED building certification
- All new county construction and renovation must be 50 percent more efficient than standard code requirements
- First planned Renewable Community Demonstration Project
- Reduced drinking water consumption per capita by 40 percent
- Preserved 16,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land
- First Florida county to adopt a green development ordinance
- Expedited green building permits to more than 1,300 dwelling units committed to green construction
- 15 neighborhood NEST programs
- 28 Green Business Partners
- Recycling programs that have extended the landfill's 40-year life by 10 years
- Nine proposed "green rezone" areas containing between 300,000-400,000 square feet of retail space
- Contractors on county demolition and salvage projects must recycle structural building materials and permit non-profit groups to remove materials that can be reused or resold
- 10 hybrid transit buses and 15 hybrid pool vehicles, saving over 8,500 gallons of gasoline annually
- Annual estimated reduction of 50,000 gallons of fossil fuels due to biodiesel fuel blend use in fleet vehicles

In 2002, the community expressed concern that Southwest Florida's tremendous growth was straining natural resources. A visionary board of commissioners responded by establishing an Office of Sustainability that initiated internal operational changes as well as innovative community stewardship programs.

In 2006, Sarasota County elevated sustainability to the highest organizational priority. It sharpened its focus to a systematic, community-wide approach and drew a literal roadmap that pulled more than 100 previously fragmented initiatives and ordinances into a cohesive strategy for lasting community change.

The Roadmap to Sustainability lays out a tangible formula for encouraging sustainable operating practices through governmental procurement, regulatory authority, and contracting, zoning and transportation policies. The Roadmap also demonstrates that sustainability extends beyond the natural environment to areas like transportation and public health.

A healthy citizenry, for example, fuels a robust economy through a productive workforce, lower health care costs and higher disposable incomes. But this positive result requires proactive wellness programs at work, environmentally-sound structures, and healthier food choices that encourage local farming and require less energy for transportation.

The Roadmap incorporates these sustainability principles into policy and long-range planning efforts, through form-based codes, land development regulations and a broadened definition of infrastructure to include natural assets.

Today, the county's Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team (NEST) program encourages youth involvement in neighborhood cleanups and watershed improvement, while building a behavioral foundation for future generations. Sarasota County's Green Business Partnership program is a pilot for the state of Florida to reward businesses operating sustainably. Sarasota County was one of 10 communities selected for a workshop on Health Impact Assessments (HIA). The county's own HIA program addresses correlations between the built environment and public health concerns like physical inactivity, pedestrian safety and air and water quality.

Florida governments seeking assistance from Sarasota County in implementing their own green initiatives include the cities and counties of Volusia, Indian River, Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, Lee, Orange, Lake, Collier, Jacksonville, Tampa, St. Petersburg, Clearwater, Key West, Pembroke Pines, Ft. Lauderdale, Miami/Dade, Tallahassee and the City of Sarasota. The county's sustainability initiatives have also been shared with representatives from California, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and Vanderbilt College. In November 2006, Sarasota County staff participated in a Rocky Mountain Institute Sustainability Summit, where 40 of the nation's top sustainability program leaders gathered to discuss successes, issues, needs and goals.

For these efforts, The Alliance for Innovation recently presented Sarasota County's Roadmap with its award for Outstanding Achievement.