

A Decade of Growth, Partnership and Innovation: 2012 Sustainability Report to the Sarasota County Commission

BACKGROUND

Since the establishment of the Office of Sustainability in 2002, Sarasota County has continued to evolve and strengthen its approach to the issue. In that decade, the operational definition of sustainability has gone from focused primarily on the environmental benefits to truly balanced, recognizing the value of the triple bottom line. Sustainability's programs have shifted from a set of fragmented practices to strategic initiatives targeted at key focal areas. In addition, building a sustainable community is no longer the responsibility of one unit; it is an enterprise-wide objective that is increasingly understood by employees no matter where they sit in the organization.

Sustainability: Satisfying our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs
Resolution 2002-119

In the two years since the last Sustainability report to the Sarasota County Commission, much has been achieved that furthers the goal of local economic, social and environmental vitality. This report and the accompanying presentation will present some of the highlights and identify the future direction for the continued evolution of sustainability.

INVENTORY OF SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

In 2008, the Office of Sustainability created the A to Z Sustainability Inventory, a document that provided a summary of the programs and policies being implemented by across all units of Sarasota County Government that contributes to governmental or community sustainability. The A to Z was 16 pages long its first year and grew to 36 pages by 2010, reflecting the evolution of the topic discussed above as well as the pace of progress in addressing the issue. Recognizing this growth, the A to Z Inventory has now been converted to an online database that can be viewed and regularly updated by staff and is searchable so that commissioners and administration can easily find information on topics that may be of interest to them and the citizens. It can be accessed by going to the Sustainability Portal on EmployeeNet and clicking on the A to Z link at the top of the page. A full report will be produced and placed on the Sarasota County website for citizen access, but the internal database tool will facilitate a more dynamic interaction among functional groups and encourage employees across disciplines to share their sustainability success stories.

2011–2012 SUSTAINABILITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Enterprise–Wide

While the A to Z Sustainability Inventory summarizes all sustainability-related programs that have been implemented over the years, a selection of the highlights of accomplishments across the organization in 2011 and 2012 is included below and discussed in the presentation.

- Economic Development Incentive Program: \$10,449,025 to 29 recipients since 2009.
- Ad Valorem Tax Exemption: Five approved exemptions since Aug 2010 with a projection of 670 new jobs.
- Energy Economic Zone: Program Ordinance and Resolution adopted June 2012. Workshops and outreach to businesses and municipalities continue.
- Phillippi Farmhouse Market: 50 vendors; ~67,000 shoppers October 2011-May 2012; mission to support local growers and artisans.



- SCAT:
 - Nearly 3 million riders per year.
 - SCAT TRAC: Real time vehicle locators and dynamic signage at transfer locations.
 - North Port Express Route.
- County Veteran Services: \$20 million in benefits and 1,300 outreach contacts in 2011.
- Human Services Programs: contracted with more than 80 programs for over \$9M in high quality human services.
- Healthy Sarasota County: 5210 Every Day! is a multi-sector campaign on healthy eating and active living.
- Rain Barrels: Monthly rain barrel workshops and sales events; 1,577 rain barrels have been sold.
- Volunteer Water Projects: Volunteers and students increase capacity in Seagrass and scallop monitoring, Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Teams, Gottfried Creek management and capturing oral history on local water issues.
- Solid Waste Collection: Contractor now using Compressed Natural Gas fleet. 37 CNG vehicles by end 2012, 57 by 2015. First CNG fueling station in the county also available for public use.
- Petroleum Clean Ups: In 2011, over 4,000 pounds of petroleum contaminants were removed from groundwater. Since 2001, 209 contaminated sites were restored to safe, usable condition.



Office of Sustainability

During this period the Office of Sustainability was primarily focused on implementing grant funded programs to maximize the local economic impact. Three programs in particular have had quantifiable outcomes for both community and enterprise sustainability.

Get Energy Smart Retrofit Program:



The Get Energy Smart Retrofit Program (GESRP) provided rebates and low income loans for to 2,239 households through a partnership with the Cities of Sarasota, Venice and North Port. Through the GESRP \$1.3 million in federal stimulus grant funds were leveraged into \$8.9 million in direct and indirect economic benefit for the community. The participating households made energy improvements in their homes that will save an estimated 3,614 Megawatt hours of electricity per year, equaling a nearly \$400,000 reduction in utility bills that will re-circulate annually in our local economy. Over 130 local contractors participated in the program, helping to strengthen the local construction industry that was so badly impacted by the recession. An estimated 92 jobs were created over the 18 months of the program.

Energy Upgrade Campaign:



The Energy Upgrade campaign was designed as a companion to the Get Energy Smart Retrofit Program, educating homeowners about how to save energy and water in their homes, even after the financial incentives were no longer available. With the intent of creating long-term demand for energy retrofits, the Energy Upgrade campaign created a comprehensive, Florida-focused website with step by step energy saving instructions and then used multiple outreach strategies to reach as many residents as possible. The website itself reached over 4,500 unique visitors in only 8 months.

Seventeen free Energy Upgrade workshops gave 519 residents in person advice on savings opportunities and another nine workshops reached 180 attendees in the community's lowest income neighborhoods. In addition, incentives were provided to local professionals to attend energy rater and green remodeling trainings to increase the local capacity to provide these services. Together these efforts have resulted in a better informed set of homeowners who will represent the next wave of business for the local energy conscious contractors.

Building Energy Retrofits:

Through a combination of two grant sources, several projects were completed to decrease the energy used in county facilities. In 2008, the Energy Management Action Plan set a goal of reducing county energy use by 20% from 2005 levels. As of mid-2012, use had been reduced 8.84% since 2005 and over \$700,000 in taxpayer dollars had not been spent to power county facilities as a result. This is despite the cost per kilowatt hour increasing by almost 25%.



Through lighting retrofits, heat reducing storm windows, a 57 kilowatt solar photovoltaic system and efforts to reduce the plug load at multiple facilities, grant funds have helped save an additional \$50,000 per year. With a total building energy cost of \$8.5 million per year, the cumulative impact of these efforts represents critical budget savings now and into the future.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

Economic and Energy Programs:

The County's sustainability strategic priorities in 2013 will include a continued programmatic focus on sustainable economic development and energy initiatives. In partnership with the Office of Economic Development, Sustainability will promote the Energy Economic Zone as an incentive for clean technology and green business job creation locally. In addition, a grant-funded expansion of the Green Business Partnership is just getting underway with a goal of dramatically increasing the number of members as well as the engagement of existing members. The Economic Development Corporation is also in the process of soliciting support for the implementation of the Business Development Network that will serve entrepreneurs in clean tech and other sectors.

Community energy efficiency programs will implement education programs through partnerships with the Fire Department and Libraries who will help reach new audiences with collaborative messaging and creative approaches. Finally, enterprise energy reduction efforts will include grant funded LED streetlight retrofits and solar hot water installations as well as collaborative efforts on a longer term energy retrofits strategic plan, innovative funding mechanisms and an increase in accountability and reporting through a review of the energy reduction goal and implementation of key metrics in new and existing buildings and fleet.

Enterprise Culture Shift:

Within Sarasota County Government, much progress has been made in engaging employees as sustainability leaders across the organization, and there are still opportunities for improvement. The ultimate objective is for the entire staff to identify with and understand their contribution to outcomes that benefit the social, environmental and economic components of our community. Sustainability will be working with Communications to implement a campaign to help each employee connect with the issue in a way that resonates with them. The continued implementation of the Green Champion training series will provide select employees with an in depth understanding of the triple bottom line and their responsibility as implementers of programs and policies. Finally, forums will be developed for employees to engage in more depth in the implementation and strategic direction of sustainability initiatives.

Indicators and Strategic Planning:

The next step in Sarasota County's Sustainability evolution is to move beyond programmatic achievements to identify quantitative indicators and set measurable goals. Without a clear understanding of the outcomes that are desired, the long list of sustainability initiatives cannot truly be evaluated for success nor can individual efforts be prioritized in times of limited resources.

FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP, FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

On this ten year anniversary of Sarasota County's institutional commitment to sustainability, it is an important opportunity to reflect on the numerous successes that would not have been possible without the leadership of the commission and representatives across the organization as well as strong support from the community. Sarasota County had the highest point total of any local government when certified through the Florida Green Building Coalition's Green Local Government Certification in 2008. There is a goal to again reach that distinction through a recertification effort this year that will capture all that has been accomplished since certification in 2008.

The anniversary is also an opportunity to look forward to a future that is not defined by an Office of Sustainability, but by an Ethic of Sustainability. Integrating that ethic throughout the organization is critical to ensuring that quality public service results in a legacy of economic, environmental and social benefits to all citizens of this community as well as future generations. By building on the strong foundation established over the last ten years, Sarasota County can achieve Prosperity in Paradise.