

SUSTAINABLE LAWRENCE AGENDA 2016

NATURAL STEPS FOR A SUSTAINABLE LAWRENCE Report of a Comprehensive Community Conversation: March 30-April 1, 2006

Introduction

More than one hundred people gathered for three days to plan an ecologically sustainable future for Lawrence Township, New Jersey. They represented every significant institution in the Township: business, education, faith, families, farming, government, neighborhoods, and activists of many stripes. The age range spanned seven decades. This future search conference¹ produced a comprehensive, long-term agenda, a set of 10 task forces to tackle key items on the agenda, and a series of action plans put forth by the various task forces.

To see the ten-year agenda, review the action plans, learn more about the Sustainable Lawrence (the nonprofit sponsoring organization), and get involved, see www.sustainablelawrence.org

The Natural Step Framework

Forming the criteria for the conference's choice of agenda items was the Natural Step framework. Developed by scientists across a full range of disciplines, it provides a solid platform on which a community can plan its future and evaluate progress toward its chosen goals. It poses four "system conditions" that serve as the basis for our choices:

- 1. Eliminate our contribution to fossil fuel dependence and to wasteful use of scarce metals and minerals;*
- 2. Eliminate our contribution to dependence on persistent chemicals and wasteful use of synthetic substances (made by humans);*
- 3. Eliminate our contribution to encroachment upon nature (e.g. land, water, wildlife, forests, soils, ecosystems);*
- 4. Meet everyone's human needs fairly and efficiently.*

Trends and Key Lessons

Our conference included a scan and evaluation of things occurring now that could affect our ability to turn Lawrence Township into a genuinely sustainable community. Here is a list of leading trends as judged by those present.

Some stand-out trends:

- ❖ Heightened energy awareness-
- ❖ We have created a throw-away economy
- ❖ Market not reflecting the true cost of goods and services, i.e. impact, consequences of clean-up, ecological damage, health care, etc.
- ❖ Advancement of science
- ❖ Greenhouse gas emissions
- ❖ Short-term thinking and planning
- ❖ Pursuit of instant gratification
- ❖ Intrusions into open space
- ❖ Increase in the disparity of wealth between rich and poor—disenfranchised youth
- ❖ Revitalization
- ❖ Diversification of communities
- ❖ Increase demand for responsible food supplies and suppliers—
- ❖ Power of individuals to change is connected to over-consumption/life style choices
- ❖ Youth programs for sustainability complement the ability of the individual to change.
- ❖ Need for meaningful long-term projects to involve students.
- ❖ Increased personal responsibility. Individuals are more concerned and looking for ways to make government and business respond.
- ❖ Is interest in organic food based on personal health or environment? Self interest.
- ❖ Organic foods seen as a fad. Many are not looking at organics as a way to environmental sustainability.
- ❖ There are things that we can do that have an impact here. If we take a simple thing i.e. “Lets save 2 miles per person we will save x gallons of gasoline”. Focus on sustainable Lawrence
- ❖ We need to make recycling work.

Lessons from our investigation:

- ❖ The financial and economic models we use are failing us. Reliance on balance sheet mentality, annual budgeting, etc. don't apply well to the current ecological challenge.
- ❖ Many trends are conceptually interrelated by economics. Economics is the system that connects values to choices in many ways. (Can we learn to see ecology as the true framework for economics?)

- ❖ Many trends are a result of financial modeling failures. We use only profit/loss analysis or ask, “Do we have the funds”. It is all a systemic problem. We look at things, and if they make a profit, they are OK. If no profit, then not.
- ❖ Self-interest is a universal driver. The challenge is to find ways to use it to move toward sustainability.
- ❖ We should focus on the trends where we can make a difference locally and regionally rather than worrying about everything that we can’t change.
- ❖ Important to help people see past their perceived self-interest, that it is, in fact, in their best interests to see connections among all these trends. On the other hand it may be just as important to understand where we each need to take personal responsibility and not wait for larger institutions to produce solutions on larger, global issues.
- ❖ We see the need for individual responsibility as well as the need to link individuals together.
- ❖ We sometimes have equally worthwhile goals that contradict each other, e.g. natural land preservation vs. affordable housing, and pedestrian trails that nourish us on natural beauty but may also result in habitat deterioration. Can we find our way beyond win-lose mentality?
- ❖ Everything is connected. It is a matter of getting people to be aware of our interrelatedness.
- ❖ National political institutions seen as lagging. Trend may be that individuals are becoming more concerned about sustainability and are looking for ways to get government and institutions to respond.

Our 10-year Agenda

Following a review of external trends and further discussion about what we have been doing about them, we spent time exploring what we want our future to be. Using the Natural Step as a framework, we described to each other how we’d like to be living here in Lawrence Township by the year 2016.

After looking at a range of desired scenarios, we asked ourselves what all our expressed wishes had in common. What do all of us at the conference already want and share in terms of a chosen future? Eventually we produced a multi-point “common ground agenda” that now serves as the program for Sustainable Lawrence and a solid consensus on sustainability goals for the community.

We have deliberately chosen ambitious goals. Given the nature of the ecological challenge, we saw no alternative. Rightful availability of clean air and water, nurturing

natural lands, healthy local food, and richly supportive community life all figure into our plans. Some items focus on specific, often invisible threats, such as auto emissions and use of toxic pesticides. Several seek to change the look and feel of community life, including new approaches to what we build and how we travel. Still others seek to transform the underlying ways we relate to each other and to Nature as a whole.

Specifically, we intend to address all of the following with a close eye on the four system conditions above.

- **AUTOMOBILES**

- ❖ Reduce auto emissions through using alternate fuel methods in Township fleets. Create additional mass transit. Encourage bicycling, walking. Personal autos: promote use of alternative methods including electric, hybrid, bio-diesel, hydrogen cells, as feasible.

- **CLEAN AIR, WATER, SOIL**

- **EDUCATION/COMMUNICATION**

- ❖ Environmental Education to make more sustainable/green-friendly choices; “Sustainable Everyday” campaign; individual action in support of a sustainable Lawrence; clear definition of “sustainable”; create greater awareness of our connectedness to Earth and recognition of the impact of individual and prevailing lifestyles on ecology; education for all ages, all segments; promote understanding of the effects and consequences of consumption.

- **ENERGY**

- ❖ Identify options for a more community-wide approach to alternative energy and promote conservation.

- **FOOD/FARMING**

- ❖ Community Food/Farming Awareness – school gardens, community gardens, increased awareness of where food comes from; promote consumption of locally-grown, sustainably-produced food; encouragement of alternative energy for farm production, integrated pest-management

- **GREEN BUILDING**

- ❖ Apply principles of “green building” (ecologically friendly, long lasting, sustainable) and develop a program for township certification; create financial incentives for use of green elements and technologies; every home an environmentally sustainable system.

- **INCLUSION**

- ❖ Ensure access and promote involvement of all groups in Sustainable Lawrence in process of planning and implementing sustainable Lawrence.

- **INTER-CONNECTED BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM**

- ❖ Linking all neighborhoods (geographic, ethnic, and religious) to each other; bike/pedestrian trails and paths as a means of exchange across cultures; opportunities for exposure to Lawrence's cultural and biological diversity

MULTIPLE TOWN CENTERS

- ❖ We envision Lawrence Township with multiple town centers, each with its unique combination of offices, homes, stores, and civic entertainment functions, offering a large portion of the Town's population the opportunity to spend time in their own welcoming neighborhood without having to travel long distances.

- **OPEN SPACE**

- ❖ Preservation and stewardship of natural lands and farms; contiguous greenways offering natural habitats for plants and animals; passive recreational opportunities to teach us how to live in closer harmony with Nature.

- **RECYCLING**

- ❖ Reduction of waste through effective recycling; operation of convenient centers for exchange of commonly used items.

- **TRANSPORTATION**

- ❖ Increased public transportation; systematic, integrated local and regional services connecting town centers, employment centers, neighborhoods, schools, etc.; electronic fare collection.

Our Community

Lawrence Township is home to 30,000 people, a variety of businesses, a growing school system, several prominent independent schools, 15 farms, a number of retirement communities, and many religious institutions. We share the space with large and small animals and many migratory birds. We are ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse. Several major highways, the Delaware & Raritan Canal, and several important creeks crisscross the township. We face all the social and ecological challenges of most American communities.

In this conference, a diverse and reasonable cross-section of the community has come together to make new choices and fashion a new vision of our common future. What we're after won't be easy. But clearly resources to support our current way of life are less available, and population throughout the world is rising.

Technology and wherewithal to apply them to the range of specific challenges sustainability poses are widely available. As a community we need to change our perspective, but we don't have to invent new methods. Most of what we need is already available in one form or another.

With this conference, we demonstrated the one thing that might have been perceived as missing: commitment. We can now identify hundreds of people in Lawrence who support this comprehensive, long-term agenda and will work to accomplish it. They represent a rich cross-section of the township and practically every major institution in it.

Our Partnerships

To achieve the results we seek, we will not operate in a vacuum. In addition to a growing matrix of connections within the Township, we plan to learn from non-local resources as well. Understanding and cultivating our interdependence seems to be one key to reaching sustainability.

We have already opened dialogue with County and State officials in New Jersey. We have heard from several nearby municipalities with whom we intend to work in partnership. Our links to other eco-municipalities in New England, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Sweden will provide significant benefits over time. Nonprofits such as the Northwest Earth Institute, provider of Sustainable Lawrence's self-study discussion courses, also have much to offer us.

Action Plans

Individual task forces of local residents already have already adopted most of the specific items in Agenda 2016. Sustainable Lawrence will support their efforts. Most task forces have outlined long-range goals plus specific results they expect to produce within the months immediately following the conference. Anyone may follow the progress of the task forces (and learn from their efforts) by checking our internet website: www.sustainablelawrence.org.

How to Get Involved

We think our agenda is more than simply a good idea. We believe most of the items on it are necessary. We further believe that achieving them will result in a healthy, rewarding, more satisfying way of life for all of us and for future generations. We foresee handsome dividends for our investment of time, energy, and capital in the form of sustainable benefits for families, our neighborhoods, businesses, and ourselves

To become part of this effort, contact:

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About Sustainable Lawrence

SL is a cooperative group of residents, businesses, government officials, congregation, and other organizations dedicated to creating an ecologically sustainable way of life for Lawrence Township, NJ. The organization is a nonprofit entity with a volunteer board of trustees and one paid staff member.

¹ See www.futuresearch.net or *Future Search* by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, Ph.D.