

Lawrence Township: Planning to be an “Eco-Municipality”

Interest in environmental issues was initially discussed by members of the Lawrence Township Committee Foundation board, including Pam Mount, now Mayor; Liz Duffy, Headmaster of The Lawrenceville School; and, Ralph Copleman, management consultant and sustainability advocate.

Ralph Copleman had heard Sarah James, co-author of *The Natural Step for Communities*, during a book tour and asked her to come speak in Lawrence. Her February 2005 presentation to a diverse group of Lawrence Township stakeholders led to an interest in *The Natural Step* as a framework to pursue sustainability in Lawrence. This event was followed up by an additional event in May 2005 to discuss next steps. Both events were very well attended by Lawrence Township citizens.

Over the summer the nonprofit “Sustainable Lawrence” was formed. A board of about twenty-five has been created that reflects the diversity of the community; it includes representatives from the municipal government (mayor and business manager), Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS), Educational Testing Service (ETS), Rider University, The Lawrenceville School, and even high school students. The first board meeting was held on December 14, 2005.

Key leaders from the nonprofit have already met and discussed some ideas on how to proceed. One critical element is that the municipal government needs to be a model for the community.

Discussions have been held with other emerging “eco-municipalities” around the country and in Canada, including Portsmouth, NH; Dane County, WI; communities on Lake Michigan in Wisconsin; and one community in the suburbs of Pittsburg, PA. The hope is to create a network of “eco-municipalities” around the country to support each other and for information sharing.

Future plans of Sustainable Lawrence include a Future Search Conference in March 2006. During this conference community stakeholders will come together to create a common ground agenda which will include action steps. The outcome of this conference (with initial plans for up to 200 participants) will in effect be the long-range plan for Sustainable Lawrence.

Reference:

The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns can Change to Sustainable Practices - By Sarah James and Torbjörn Lahti

Web pages of interest:

The Natural Step - <http://www.naturalstep.org/>

The Natural Step in Canada - <http://www.naturalstep.ca/about.html>

Wisconsin Partners for Sustainability - <http://www.wiscpsa.org/modules/tinycontent/index.php?id=3>

Sustain Dane - <http://www.sustaindane.org/>

Future Search - <http://www.futuresearch.net/>

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