

Towards a Sustainability Plan for the St. Louis Region

(Liz Forrestal, 3-08-08)

The time is right to create a sustainability plan for the St. Louis region. There is growing interest in this pursuit among many area communities, businesses, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, citizen groups and residents. This project is an attempt to coordinate and steer a number of independent efforts that are currently underway into one comprehensive plan that will guide the healthy future of our region.

The challenge in the coming years is how to provide a high quality of life in urban areas while still assuring the earth's ability to sustain society with a stable climate, clean air and water, fertile soils, and natural areas with abundant biological diversity. To do this, we will need to develop greener cities which, among other things:

- consume fewer resources
- create less waste
- pollute less
- reduce their greenhouse gas emissions
- sprawl less into the surrounding countryside

A regional sustainability plan for St. Louis would encompass these various issues. It would also promote a coordinated approach to environmental sustainability that enrolls community leaders – civic, corporate and others – throughout the area. If done right, it would provide new business opportunities and create green-collar jobs.

A number of U.S. cities are recognizing the economic and lifestyle advantages that a comprehensive sustainability plan can bring, and are launching their own efforts. It's time to do it here. Right now, there's an informal task force of St. Louisans – comprised of environmental attorneys, architects, representatives of non-profits and businesses, and government leaders – which is embarking on such a plan. We are studying the sustainability efforts of many other communities. We are also investigating the possibility of incorporating our fledgling sustainability plan under the Star Community Index, a new joint venture of the U.S. Green Building Council, ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) and the Center for American Progress (www.iclei.org/index.php?id=7250). The STAR index promises to be a standardized framework and rating system under which communities like ours can work towards regional sustainability.

Our work is in its infancy. We're just laying the groundwork for the numerous players who will need to be involved to make this regional plan a reality. We plan to launch a web site soon, so that any interested parties can join in our effort. Our aim is to be as inclusive as possible, so that everyone in the broader community can play a part in this important work.

The time will come for you to join in this effort, and we hope you will. Until then, drop a note to Liz Forrestal (lizforrestal@yahoo.com) or Tom Redick (tpr@geeclaw.com) to let us know of your interest; we'll notify you when the web site is up and running.