

Southwest Michigan Sustainability Committee

April 29, 2014, 10:00 am– 12:00 pm

Welcome and Introductions - *Marcy Colclough, Senior Planner, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC)*

Sustainability = meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. **Economic, environmental, and social systems** are in balance to create and sustain a positive quality of life for current and future generations. SWMPC and MGSSBF wish to advance sustainability efforts at the municipal and regional level and to bring sustainability processes to the fore-front of decision makers. With the sharing of ideas/experiences and common aspirations, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration and mobilizing local resources we can help transform the region through the development of more sustainable neighborhoods and communities by: Preserving **environmental** integrity; Increasing **economic** prosperity; Advancing and achieving **social** equity; Improving the quality of life and elevating the value of education.

Examples of municipal sustainability activities may include managing waste, recycling programs, zero waste events, complete green streets, walkable communities, placemaking, energy efficiency and conservation, renewable energy, supporting local foods and agriculture, green building, affordable housing, reducing greenhouse gases, green zones, protecting natural resources and water, green jobs, etc. How can we encourage the implementation of policies and practices that **better integrate housing, transportation, employment, workforce development, environmental and infrastructure investments** in the region? How can we foster **holistic/creative problem solving**?

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) Background -*John Egelhaaf, Executive Director, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission*

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) engages individuals, businesses and governments to improve our region. The SWMPC board is interested in creating a regional sustainability committee. SWMPC's board members are appointed by the three counties we serve (Cass, Berrien and Van Buren). The SWMPC board meets quarterly and believes this committee is needed in our region. The regional sustainability committee would report to the SWMPC Board every quarter.

It is up to the members to determine how to best move forward with this committee. The committee can decide what topics are right for southwest Michigan, what structure is best, etc. We are all on a path of sustainability. How can we help each other advance? How can this committee help you accomplish your goals while we make progress as a region? This committee can raise awareness of sustainability efforts in the region. It can work to foster a **creative/holistic problem solving approach**.

Michigan's Great Southwest Sustainable Business Forum's (MGSSBF)

Background - *Becky Kliss, President*

The Forum's is a 501(c)3 and its goal is to provide education, resources and networking opportunities to businesses in southwest Michigan. A local example was shared on how a business saved money by upgrading to more energy efficient lighting. The forum provides a venue to share these successes.

Sustainability Overview - *Norman Christopher, Executive Director, Sustainable Community Development Initiative, Grand Valley State University*

Norman Christopher's background is in the private sector and is now a professor at Grand Valley State University. Sustainability means, "a state in which society doesn't systematically undermine natural or social systems within the biosphere" (The Natural Step).

The Sustainability Journey

- Awareness-Where is our community regarding sustainability?
- Understanding-What does Sustainability mean to our community?
- Application- Where can our community apply sustainability best practices?
- Progress- What are the results of Sustainability? (visionary leadership and commitment)
- Change- What's the long-term value and collective impact of sustainability? (Change in our Behaviors)

Recognize place as capital!

Three Legged Stool

- Environmental
- Social
- Economic

Four Legged Chair

- Social
- Environment
- Economic
- *****Place-Culture, Community*****

Fundamentals of Sustainability (Guiding Principles)

- Circular Economy (regeneration, renewal, reuse)
- Systems approaches (connectivity)
- Life Cycle Analysis ("LCA") [cradle to cradle]
- Design for the Environment ("DfE")
- Innovation (creativity and entrepreneurship)
- Inclusivity (voices)
- Transparency (openness)
- Accountability (buck stops here)
- Resiliency (adaptive, ability to come back)
- Environmental stewardship and servant leadership (taking care, service)
- "Triple Bottom Line" of environmental, economic, and social impact (results and outcomes)
- Continuous improvement (raising the bar)
- Place making (local economic development)

Michigan's Great Southwest Resources from an Outside Perspective:

- Quality of public schools, healthcare, and parks etc.
- Several small businesses and a few large ones
- Strong attraction to Chicago
- **Tourism**
- **Outdoor and recreational activities**
- Arts and culture
- Shopping districts

- Downtown re-development
- **Agriculture**
- **Deep water port**

The Sustainability *Journey!*

- Establishing a “Community Sustainability Partnership”
 - Identity
 - Mission/vision
 - Community stakeholders
 - Organizational structure
 - Stakeholder partnership agreement
 - Administration
 - Goals
 - Assessments/reporting
- Partner with other trade, professional, and community organizations within and outside the region
 - Grand Rapids CSP (www.grpartners.org)
 - West Michigan Chapter USGBC (www.usgbc.org)
 - West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum (www.wmsbf.org)
 - Local First (www.localfirst.com)
 - Michigan Municipal League (www.mml.org)
 - Regional CSPs in West Michigan (www.gvsu.edu/wmcsp)

Michigan Turn Around Plan Relates to Sustainability

1. Responsibly Manage Finances
2. Effectively & efficiently provide public services
3. Create a competitive business climate
4. Strategically invest for future growth
5. Accelerate the economic growth of Cities & Metro areas
6. Leverage Assets to grow the new Michigan

Some key success factors for consideration

- Meaningful Dialogue voices
- Clear visionary and strategic planning (vitality, livability, and resiliency)
- Innovation and entrepreneurship (creativity)
- Empowerment (Bottom up, can do)
- Working relationships and community partnerships (**trust**)
- Outcomes and performance (measure what matters)
- Continuous improvement (celebrate small wins)
- Transformational change (modify behavior)
- Sustainable Development Best Practices (what works)
- The Power of one! (Collective impact of individual efforts)

Roundtable Discussion – *Marcy Colclough and J.B. Hoyt*

-How can we align efforts with the **Strategic Leadership Council**? Partnerships with local governments are key and how can we work together and find a way to grow. The idea is to start at the core and help it grow from the inside out.

-We need to **focus on what's working** and expand on those successes.

-**Communication** is key. Need to work to improve communication within our region. We have a great community, how we do continue to provide more value and more collaboration and conversation. How do we move forward, **cooperate** and work together?

-A good example is how a group formed and is working together to improve health in Berrien County. Health could be added to the list of things for this committee to address.

-When working together do not create things too fast or to make them too complicated. **Keep it simple.**

What is working that we could build upon?

-Find out what is working and how we can spread what we are doing to other areas in our region.

-Updating **master plans**. The City of St. Joseph, Chikaming Township, and St. Joseph Township are updating their master plans right now. Van Buren County just updated their master plan.

-The 7 County SW MI Solid Waste Collaboration works together to host **recycling and hazardous waste events**. Over the last 5 years their effort is growing with use and popularity.

-Difficult to **find a local service provider** to dispose of chemicals and industrial by-products in an environmentally safe way. Other companies are dealing with this problem.

- Michigan's **State Tourism Plan** focuses on **sustainable tourism** - how can we utilize these **principles** to guide local efforts?

- There is also a **green venue certification** that we could strive for with our local community events/festivals. Maybe we can help to make one of the local events a **zero waste event**.

-There is collaboration on **local foods** that we haven't seen in a while, especially with farms and how food moves. There may be opportunity to work with institutions.

Opportunities:

-Transportation plays a huge role in our economy. **Transportation** is comprised of bus, trails, roads, rails, port, etc.

- Each government operates differently based on the community's needs but collaboration could help the region. People **live and work** in different areas, we also **recreate** in areas other than the ones we live.

-Identify and work towards **common goals and priorities**. **Trust is important**.

-Create a visual - **overlay plans** to see how they connect (or don't). What are the common goals? Strive for an integrated hierarchy of plans - regional – county- city/village- townships.

- Identify **sustainable service companies** for local businesses. MGSSBF has an on-line directory, but it isn't well known or well used at this point.

-How mapping and implementing **(land and water) trails** can connect communities and the region. There is a SW MI Non-motorized plan with a vision of a connected system. There is much interest and funding available for land and water trails right now.

-**Create opportunities for dialogue** and **find connections**. Facilitate, connect the dots and **develop community leadership**. Maybe not through traditional meetings.

-Utilize **internships** at MGSSBF and local governments.

- Example of how GVSU started **zero waste** football games. When someone comes to you with an idea like “zero waste” there is a partnership to figure it out and do it. This is now growing to other events at the college.

-Some people might be looking for the one big idea, but it is often a **lot of little ideas** that will get you on the path to sustainability. Having a zero waste event could be the next step to educate the public on waste issues. It could create more marketability/promotion opportunities for the event.

Next Steps

- Piggy back on what the **Sustainable Business Forum** already is doing and create more awareness
- Align/connect with the **Leadership Council**
- Consider hosting or supporting **forums on key topics** such as local foods, transportation, bike paths, sustainable tourism, zero waste events. Possibly create a **website** as a resource and to highlight successes.
- How can we have an impact on **master plan development**?
- **Communication/Network/Leverage/Collaborate** - There is a need for connecting what is going on in the region. There is a need to create more dialogue in our region (maybe not through traditional meetings).
- We can work on **small steps** to **build awareness**.

Next Meeting – Watch for a doodle poll to determine date and time.

Adjourn