



Minnesota **GreenStep Cities** Workshops

Achieving
sustainability
through proven
best practices

Best Practice 24: Benchmarks & **Community Engagement**

GreenStep Cities Workshop Notes: January 4, 2017

Register for our February 1st, 2017 workshop here:
https://gscworkshop_february.eventbrite.com

Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota

New Resource in Town! Annie Levenson Falk and Carmen Caruthers, Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota

Website: <http://cubminnesota.org/>

Overview

- Organization started in July 2016
- Interested in feedback to better assist consumers
- Working primarily with energy issues
- Statewide work
- Utility outreach work
 - Rate setting
 - Minnesota Power
 - Alternative ways to design energy rates – time of day rates, block rates, etc.
 - Consumer interest is broader than just keeping rates low – interest in clean or green energy
 - CUB helps people understand energy efficiency through cost effective options
 - How utilities share data
 - Goal is to protect consumers' privacy but still provide enough information to make informed decisions about energy usage
 - Models of success in Illinois
- Help interpreting energy bills to save money – could be one on one or through utility bill clinics
 - Evaluate home energy usage:
 - Electricity
 - Heating & cooling
- Connections with people and utility rebates for various household equipment
- Often recommend home energy audits before large investments are made

Community Engagement

- Educate individuals about what they could do in their own house hold to save energy
- Resilience – being prepared for the future and the ability to adapt

- Less dependent if you use less
- Nationally \$2,000 is the average spent on electricity, heating and cooling
 - Varies by location/income etc.
 - Low income households pay proportionally more of their income than others
- Need to consider that low income households may have limited ability to control their energy costs
- Eligibility for various assistance programs changes on a yearly basis
- CUB publishes monthly newsletter with helpful tips and news
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScxa2aSB34WM8gngj-XCE8-gAxa-KVDnmrULf1rXZm3VDkBMA/viewform>
- CUB also wants to help with advocacy – benchmarking or other aggregated utility data
 - Regional Indicators Initiative
 - Help breaking down what is happening at the Public Utilities Commission
- Do cities know where to send their citizens for energy assistance?
 - Clean Energy Resource Teams
 - Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota!

Engagement in the Context of Equity

Michelle Fure, Manager of Public Involvement at the Metropolitan Council

- Community engagement is an important aspect to include in Comprehensive Plan updates
- Local Planning Assistance unit at the Met Council is putting together training opportunities, articles, webinars, & workshop series on community engagement in 2017 for the entire state – metro is prioritized since comp plans are required in that region (website: <https://metro council.org/Communities/Planning/Local-Planning-Assistance.aspx>)
- The only way to plan for people is to include people in the planning process
- Important to make sure that there are different voices to help set agendas, not just to comment once the plan is complete
- Authentic community engagement is time consuming, complicated, and can be difficult because you have to share your agenda, which can be uncomfortable
- A persons lived experience is just as important as a technical expertise
- Have data and expertise that pairs with lived experience
- You need to go to where the people are (churches, schools, community centers, etc.)
 - Don't assume that people don't want to be involved in the process just because they're not at the meeting
- If you haven't participated in the process before it's probably hard to trust the process, so it is important to build relationships
- We don't expect that people will want to participate in "behind the scenes" work but it's important to consider that they may want to participate and just don't know how or don't know that they should.
- Authentic engagement takes time – have to build relationships, it helps folks to have a stake in the process. Need to balance short and long term objectives (short term objective may be one planning element, while long term objective is building relationships)

- Share decision making so that the outcomes will benefit broadly – need to embody a lot of the principles, respect their time as well
- Engagement doesn't need to cost a lot of money
 - For example, sending someone to a community meeting that is already happening is not expensive
- Newsletters maybe aren't the best method of communication – explore alternative methods
 - If language is a barrier the community may not necessarily want it translated – maybe the challenge to have it in English is good
 - Hard to know what they want if there's no communication between groups
- Understand how we should invite and make people feel welcomed – people at the front of the room are the right people, partner with the correct groups to invite other organizations
- People need to have a stake to engage and participate
- Be mindful of what “citizen commissions” mean and what the message is that is being sent to immigrants who are not citizens yet but want to be, consider “community commissions”
- Don't assume anything – that people aren't interested, or that they know what's happening, or are able to come to meetings
- Ask the community what forms of communication are most effective. They want to be asked. Helps to build the bridge between the communities and start of the relationship building
- Public participation spectrum – make sure that the end results feel authentic. It may be messy or uncomfortable but worthwhile
- Set outcomes that are both short term and long term and intentionally set goals around what your outcomes are going to be
- Helps to get city officials who are out campaigning to talk about planning issues while they are out in the community
- Met Council article about engagement during Thrive MSP 2040 process, including example engagement plan: <https://metro council.org/News-Events/Planning/Newsletters/Thrive-MSP-2040-Collaborative-problem-solving-sha.aspx>

Questions from Audience

- Q: Have gender roles impacted the way you've interacted with communities? How have you dealt with people who can't get beyond their own core issues?
 - Yes encountered gender roles – be flexible to address them. Language can be really important. Part of talking through a conversation is working through all issues.
- Q: How should citizens encourage their cities to address goals that are not required in comp plans (the stretch goals in 2040 vision – adopting state goal of reducing carbon by 80% and challenging racial disparities)?
 - If there are concerns in the community, then the local community could be a big voice in how these things are addressed. Met council can't mandate some things, but concerned people could be a better vehicle
- Q: How can we contact you?
 - Can contact your Met Council district rep or other Met Council staff
<https://metro council.org/About-Us/TheCouncil/CouncilMembers.aspx>
 - Michelle Fure directly: michelle.fure@metc.state.mn.us

Panel Discussion

- Panel members: Shann Finwall , Ted Redmond, Amir Nadav, Greg Oxley, Terry Gipps
- Shann – Sustainability director at city of Maplewood – liaison for the city council
 - Maplewood – formed an environmental commission 10 years ago
 - Ted Redmond and Maplewood have been partnering together on benchmarking and carbon footprint analysis
- Ted – Newly elected to Maplewood’s environmental commission. Works as a private consultant
 - Important to drive planning beyond the required comp plans
 - Wants the commission to take a more hands on approach to do projects for the city
- Amir – City of Eagan’s advisory commission, former GreenStep Cities coordinator, teaches a U of M capstone class on sustainable communities
 - Importance of goal setting
 - What are the things you want to strive for?
 - Annual goal setting process – important to invest energy
 - Enthusiasm for goals both from commission and staff
 - Staffing is often a barrier to sustainability project and community engagement
 - Not just one department in charge of work – work should be multi-department
 - Staff overturn – initially challenging
 - Few cities outside of Minneapolis/St. Paul have a dedicated sustainability staff person
- Greg – Former Utility Lobbyist, new commission member for City of Eagan
 - Eagan’s participation in GreenStep trailed off as the projects became larger and more expensive
 - GreenStep Cities resurrection of the program has become an important goal of the commission
- Terry – Co-founder of Alliance for Sustainability, founding commissioner for St Louis Park’s environmental commission, former GreenStep Cities advisor
 - Community engagement is key to success
 - St. Louis Park didn’t want their commission to be the normal commission – wanted active, dynamic communication with neighborhoods, congregations, schools
 - Commission also goes by “Sustainable SLP” to reach out to public
 - Workgroups have a commissioner but also invite citizens
 - Huge public engagement on plastic bags and take out containers
 - iMatters youth involvement has been key to getting climate planning started

Questions from Audience

- Residential energy challenge in Maplewood – Could you elaborate on what it was?
 - Part of Xcel Energy’s Partners in Energy challenge, involves looking at energy data and doing education/outreach
 - Teams of multiple households compete on energy efficiency
- It is essential to bring together diverse youth – this is our future work force and the people who will address sustainability in the future. Is there a way to integrate kindergarten-12th grade STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) into the GreenStep program?

- Best practice 25 action 1– mostly about green business but discusses training
- Maybe something good to add to GSC – good way to involve school districts and catalyze communication between local governments and school districts
- Involving young people in STEM, especially underrepresented groups, changes the conversation by integrating more points of view
- Website about engagement: <http://www.onemn.org/>