



THE 5 DOMAINS & ECOSTEP: AN INTRODUCTION

A Needs Assessment for Training and Education for Community Sustainability

Approximately six years ago the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities commenced work in southeast Nebraska and western Iowa to identify the needs for the most populated region of the state to be able to achieve a level of sustainability – sustainability in environmental qualities, in social/cultural qualities, in the application of appropriate technologies, in balanced economic growth, and in fair and equitable public policies. Three years of funded study (NETF) lead to the comprehensive report, “The Flatwater Metroplex”, with the following ten recommendations for growth management in the region:

- Establish a system of coordinated planning among the various jurisdictions
- Establish a system of regular communications on growth management
- Establish a public system of reported annual indicators
- Develop system of shared information about global “best practices”
- Identify the most fragile eco-systems in the region
- Identify alternative strategies for environmental protections
- Develop recommendations for land development of rural acreages/housing
- Establish a regional policy on use and appropriation of water resources
- Establish a regional policy on sources, production, and supply of energy resources
- Development public policy mechanisms for rural/urban coalitions

Following the Flatwater recommendations, the JISC moved into research and communications regarding Nebraska’s most critical natural resources: land, water, energy, materials, and food systems. With these resources in mind, and the goal of a sustainable habitat and sustainable communities, we directed a charette to study the development alternatives for six prototypical environments in the region. We published the results under the heading, “Envisioning Regional Design”.

From the breadth of stakeholder engagement in the charettes we next moved into creating partnerships, under the heading, “Envisioning Nebraska” and initiated planning for the formation of municipal green building programs in the cities of Omaha and Lincoln. The Omaha organization is calling itself the “Green Omaha Coalition”, and the Lincoln organization is calling itself the “Lincoln Green by Design” partnership. Both organizations are voluntary membership structures that formed in Fall 2007.

The information, networking, and engagement of individuals, civic bodies, and businesses and organizations through these activities have provided us the key data and information for a four-part needs assessment for sustainability training and education.



PART A. GAP ANALYSIS

The current situation in Nebraska, and especially in the most populous region of the state is that there is little cooperation among jurisdictions (i.e. counties, cities), or few shared interests in the essential qualities of sustainable communities and environments. There is little understanding of the principles of “smart growth”, “new urbanism”, “conservation planning”, “green building”, “green business”, “green economics and finance”, or the connections between energy consumption, buildings, and global warming.

The necessary situation for the achievement of sustainability – at any scale of community – is that the stakeholders in properties, the professionals as designers, planners, and advisors, the trades and craftspersons as implementers and consumers, and the businesses as consumers, retailers and manufacturers, and the civic leaders as visionaries and creators of public policies – all will have understandings of the conditions and principles of sustainability, and all will have access to useful information from which to inform their decisions about the future and Nebraska’s opportunities for the future.

Through JISC’s direct observations, questionnaires, consultations with persons in key positions in the region, reviews of relevant national literature, interviews, focus groups and reviews of records and related reports, we believe the gap between the current situation and the necessary or desired situation rests within the challenges of focused training and education for the key sectors of community stakeholders, as well as the youth and our future leaders. We believe the solutions to such futures lie in the following categories of change:

- Connecting the design and planning of buildings to the several environmental consequences
- Connecting the impact of existing buildings and community infrastructure to the type and production of energy resources, both in the present and for the future.
- Understanding the consequences and alternatives for growth management for the future
- Understanding the net energy and natural resource consequences of the use, transportation, and waste of materials in the construction, facilities sectors
- Understanding the responsibilities of businesses, industry, and manufacturers regarding the natural resource, energy, pollutants, and global climate changes that may occur from their decisions
- The need for consumers to understand the relation of energy efficiencies, economics, the sources of energy and the future demand from community growth

PART B. PRIORITIES

Among the above needs, we believe the greatest and earliest impact on our communities could be implemented by a variety of stakeholders having better information and understandings of the following topics:

1. Construction and Demolition Waste Streams
2. Business Consumption and By-products Waste
3. Energy Efficiencies and Carbon Reduction: Existing Structures and New Construction



The key stakeholder audiences would be:

- Construction contractors and sub-contractors
- Design and Planning professionals
- Facility managers
- Developers
- Real Estate professionals
- Civic leadership

PART C. CAUSES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

By and large the need for the recommendations identified in the Gap Analysis results from either a lack of, or unwillingness for, stakeholder change in methods/behavior in response to a changing world around them, or, their not having sufficient data and information about the interdependent world around their situation. Most of us have not been educated to look for the comprehensive, connected, and interdependent consequences of our actions in the physical world.

With new information, comprehensive strategic thinking, and an intention to seek balanced sustainable solutions to the making and maintenance of our communities there will be multiple new opportunities in the domains of economics, environment, social/cultural programming, technologies, and changes to our public policies.

PART D. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Training and other informative interventions are called for, if we believe in the future progress, well-being, and continuing good quality of life for our communities and their future residents. It is no accident that the communities around the U.S. (Austin, Portland, Seattle, Chicago, Denver, Madison, etc) that have become the strongest magnets for economic growth and quality living environments are also the same communities that have discovered the value of, and made sustainable commitments to “being green”, or growing “smart”, or have responded to new environmental demands with interdependent thinking and planning. These are not inherent qualities, they are learned behaviors. We can help teach such behaviors.

*“For in the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand,
and we will understand only what we are taught.”*

—Baba Dioum