

The City of Northampton, MA

In the last decade, Northampton has undertaken a significant number of projects that promote sustainability. As a result of these many efforts they were well-poised when they chose to work on a “Sustainability Plan” for the city.



In 2006, the City conducted a series of community focus groups designed to include community input in the process, asking local constituents questions on the future vision of Northampton. These responses helped define the Sustainable Northampton plan, prepared with the help of the Cecil Group, a planning and design firm experienced in preparing municipal plans with an emphasis on sustainability. A draft sustainability plan, along with a set of identified defined indicators to help measure progress in sustainability improvements, has been presented to the community in a second series of focus groups during 2007.



Lessons Learned:

- Comprehensive planning can help coordinate diverse efforts towards sustainability
- Public engagement is important in working towards sustainability
- Working towards sustainability needs to be a multi-year, multi-program effort



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

With a population of 28,978 residents¹, Northampton retains its character, a unique blend of a small town atmosphere with a strong urban center. The City is home to several important attractions including:

- Smith College
- The Academy of Music 6th oldest theatre in the United States
- Several parks including Look park, Child's Park
- Community gardens where residents can rent garden space and tend flower or vegetable plots²
- Hampshire County Courthouse
- Significant number of independently owned businesses

A 2007 snapshot of significant achievements³ towards sustainability by the City include:

- The new Northampton Senior Center is on track to be certified as the first LEED building in Northampton.
- The city's Commonwealth Capital Score has been the highest in the state every year for the four years the program has been in effect.
- A focus on a strong downtown as the center of the community. This is why the National Trust for Historic Places listed Northampton as one of their Dozen Distinctive locations and why this year the APA selected Main Street as one of ten Great Streets in America for this first year of the APA Great Streets program.
- A major focus on brownfields redevelopment that has seen the old Fire Station remade into a vibrant cafe and office building and the Roundhouse Parking Lot, a former manufactured gas plant (MGP) about to become a hotel and parking garage.
- A big push towards affordable housing, giving the city 11.9% affordable housing, with the percentage increasing slowly but steadily.
- Every new suburban subdivision in the past decade has been an open space residential development (cluster).
- Preserving 0.5% to 1% of the city each year as permanently protected open space.
- Converting many of the City's DPW vehicles to bio-diesel fuel.
- Expanding bike paths and bike lanes, and increasing the number of bike racks for parking in the downtown district.
- Hiring the Pedal People (2006) to haul trash from the downtown district (Pedal People use bicycles exclusively for transportation to haul trash and recycling to the landfill).
- Enrolling more than 700 households in New England Greenstart⁴
- Hiring a city-wide Energy Officer in 2007 to coordinate efforts to improve energy efficiency.
- Installing solar panels on the JFK Middle School (2006), funded with Clean Energy Choice funds.
- Entering into a contract to trap methane gas produced at the landfill in 2005.
- Providing a website link to Walk Score, a tool produced by Front Seat Management, enabling residents to view city sites that are within walking distance of a particular locale (work, residence, etc.)

¹ http://www.northamptonma.gov/uploads/listWidget/2816/Northampton_profile.pdf

² www.northamptonma.gov/aboutNorthampton/History_of_Northampton/

³ Mayor's for Climate Protection, http://www.coolmayors.com/common/directory/company_detail.cfm?QID=28352&clientID=11061

⁴ Center for Ecological Technology, <http://www.cetonline.org/2007ProgressReport.pdf>



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