



**Bloomington Sustainability Action Plan Open House  
Meeting Notes  
13 February 2018  
City Hall McCloskey Room  
4 pm – 5:45 pm**

**Topic:** Climate, Energy, and the Built Environment

**Facilitator:** Mark Levin

**Easel/Note Pad:** Chris Reinhardt, BCOS

**Computer notes:** Marla Cherney

**Number of participants:** 8-9

### **Summary of Interests Discussed**

- Appreciation expressed for local solar innovation and increases in hybrid car usage, increased local awareness of sustainability issues, and successful bicycle-friendly initiatives
- Concerns expressed with lack of sustainability incentives for businesses, ineffective green development incentives, slow pace to convert to hybrid public vehicles, lack of infrastructure for hybrid vehicles, no existing municipal energy or greenhouse gas emissions audit, still have areas where bicycle safety is lacking, and the fact that there is no comprehensive community vision to promote energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions for all groups of people
- Group expressed a desire to learn more about the regulatory structure in the state of IN surrounding Duke Energy and other entities to promote better conversations
- Group emphasized the urgent need to fill the position of Bloomington Sustainability Coordinator
- Group recommended the creation of a shuttle system to decrease automotive transportation in downtown Bloomington, green pilgrimage buildings and spaces, efficiency standards target at small to mid-level manufacturers and businesses, an intermediary program to assist businesses with resources to improve energy efficiency, and a capital cost finance program to provide low-interest financing for sustainability projects
- Group recommended improvements in evaluating the needs and wants of all Bloomington sectors and individuals with respect to energy efficiency, energy efficiency awareness for business owners, the establishment of baseline data for residents and businesses to compare to, demand-side and usage initiatives to assist with energy efficiency, and resource networks for businesses

To achieve the goals, the group recommended establishing baselines for energy usage across sectors and areas, creating partnerships with landlords to include utilities in rent, increasing city staffing to assist the sustainability sector or hiring consultants, work with energy companies to encourage action plans for efficiency, create financing opportunities, create adaptation strategies for climate change, consider all types of utilities and their impacts on energy efficiency, and complete energy audits to identify the best places for increased efficiency in homes and businesses

### **Detailed Notes**

#### ***What is going well in Bloomington?***

- This year Bloomington promoted homeowner solar and demand from the people the city reached out to far exceeded number of contractors available for work

- The city made people excited about solar
- Solar contractors still have work going forward through the new year despite the state's elimination of the 30-year net metering program
- Leadership in solar initiatives in Bloomington from churches and synagogues led way and helped increase interest for solar in other areas of the city and state
- The city led by example on solar by installing solar on city buildings
- Bloomington has grown more serious about low-cost housing and mediating with developers
- One participant noted that while adoption of city hybrid buses has been done slowly and reluctantly, there has still been some adoption of hybrid buses
- Community members acceptance of hybrid vehicles caused Bloomington to lead the way in hybrid cars with the largest population of hybrid cars in the state of IN
- Cars and solar projects speak to general citizen awareness in Bloomington about sustainable issues, which one participant felt was above average when compared to the rest of the state and country
- Bloomington has made significant progress in making the city more bicycle friendly, which has led to reduction in car usage and therefore greenhouse gas emissions

### ***What is not going so well in Bloomington?***

- A group of several business owners expressed concerns that many businesses in the city have a less than favorable view of obstacles Bloomington has regarding the development process
- One participant shared his experience with his business and felt that Bloomington had offered assistance to make his business greener and more energy efficient through capital cost reductions, but those promises were not met
- Business owners also expressed concerns that the city was expecting them to change their behavior by making developers jump through hoops rather than incentives to encourage sustainable development
- Another participant shared data on the current green development incentives in place which typically only have zero or one individual utilizing per year
- Sustainable development incentives and codes are not written in a way that makes them attractive to all businesses and instead always target housing rather than commercial uses; even then, no one is taking advantage and using those incentives
- Concerns over the slow pace of converting public vehicles to hybrid, especially buses, trash trucks, and other work vehicles, causing the city to burn a significant amount of gas and diesel from public vehicles
- Concerns over the limited infrastructure for hybrid vehicles (charging stations, etc.), which could discourage community members from purchasing and using hybrid or electric vehicles
- Concerns over the lack of an energy efficiency vision combined with discouraging factors, such as cheap energy, that cause all groups of people to resist adopting deep energy efficiency practices
- Concern over the lack of an energy audit to identify the greatest areas of greenhouse gas emissions and to find where to make the best returns on investment in sustainable development
- Concerns that while bicycle paths and safety have improved, there are still areas people avoid going with bikes because of safety and accessibility issues
- Concerns over difficulties with Duke Energy and the lack of local control and transparency over energy production and systems

### ***What changes would you like to see in Bloomington in the next 5 years?***

- Free transport to shuttle people would help to eliminate some people driving downtown, encourage people to walk and bike downtown rather than drive, and eliminate transportation emissions
- Assess what residents and the city as a whole want to see in energy efficiency and create a lead for the direction the city decides to take to diminish the current overemphasis on solar and municipality efforts
- Generate ideas for how to manage energy efficiency in the city at large and for different economic levels
- Currently, some aspects of energy efficiency are covered well, but must expand to other areas such as energy efficiency in homes, rentals, low-income residents, high-income residents, etc.

- City must determine how much they are willing to invest and how much businesses should invest to make it clear to businesses in the community what steps they should take
- Work with Duke Energy to make businesses aware of how their emissions compare to those in every other community, expanding the services Duke Energy has in place for residential customers; use to set goal and baseline targets for businesses
- Work with other communities to form pacts similar to those in place in Northern IN and work with energy companies to replace street lights with LEDs and then reduce energy prices through tariffs
- Work with the Regulatory Commission to gain a better understanding of what IN regulatory rules have to offer the community - use those to approach Duke and other companies to work with them
- Determine whether substation needs (lacking power or price issues) can be met by demand-side changes in the city rather than expanding service
- Fill the position of Bloomington Sustainability Coordinator city employee
- Encourage no pilgrimage sites in Bloomington, high-performance buildings where people gather
- Diminish tension between visual community architecture with sustainable architecture
- Allow buildings to ignore architecture standards only for meeting energy efficiency criteria or in certain areas ideal for green buildings
- Work with businesses, especially small to mid-level, to create regulations and standards for energy efficiency
- Assess how capital upgrade payments by small and mid-level businesses can be incorporated into the payment system without overwhelming those businesses to assist in encouraging energy efficiency
- Create an intermediary group through the city to help businesses be better energy decision-makers and help them improve their situation and move to more energy efficient situations and provide resources to businesses to become more sustainable
- Address the biggest barrier to energy efficiency, that of capital costs, by providing access to low-interest money to finance upgrades for both businesses and residents
- Identify low-cost capital to invest in energy-saving financing through rotating energy efficiency fund
- City can encourage local banks to come together and open low-cost financing through utilizing low-return, low-risk investment processes and City asset backing
- Take better advantage of state and federal resources for individuals and city
- Incorporate blower fans in residential and commercial buildings
- Increase energy inspection for rental properties and provide assistance to those who really need to be more energy efficient while also creating energy equity among different residential groups

***What can Bloomington do to move forward to address concerns and to achieve its vision for the future in the next 5 years?***

- Complete an overall energy plan with a metric to follow, including repeating measurements and evaluation to continue energy efficiency
- Compare different kind of technologies within different parts of community to see the current energy efficiency situation
- Create a contest to create the most efficient energy and water usage or other ways to give incentives for energy efficient buildings, particularly apartment complexes
- Never look at electricity usage on its own, instead examine combined issue of all utilities to determine practical energy efficient and greenhouse gas mitigating levels
- Utilize financing programs to offset the effects of the expiring renewable energy rebate program for utility companies
- Act aggressively to make solar technology as affordable to as many people as possible to continue efforts in future, perhaps through nonprofit or public utility efforts
- Combine wholesale purchase and sale of solar panels by the city with additional financing resources
- Expand the current solar resale program, which had space for 40 people but had requests for 400, to continue encouraging the use of solar

- Address the report by the newspaper which misled residents about the phase-out process for net metering - reported that net metering is discontinued, but didn't mention that the program continues for 15 years before expiring
- Explore options for net metering of businesses and homes between practical and impractical sites
- Even with loss of net metering, educate individuals on how small photovoltaic and geothermal can still be beneficial
- Address ways businesses are billed for electricity, where the cheapest energy comes off the bill first, which decreases incentives to reduce usage and/or use renewable energy
- Create aggressive and concrete goals for the city to create a real commitment to work towards
- Increase housing density to reduce energy footprint (and increase energy efficiency measures)
- Address the issue of climate change, and how can the city come up with something more meaningful to take action on climate change and adapt to known impacts such as the positive-feedback cycle of warmer summers and increased energy usage of air conditioning
- Develop infrastructure, regulations, and building codes to accommodate for stronger and more frequent storms as well as planting trees and rotating crops to encourage moisture retention of soils during increased periods of drought
- Consider how ecosystems and urban agriculture affect and are affected by increasing temperatures to determine the most effective methods to mitigate climate change effects
- Recognize the multiple effects of green building measures, such as rooftop and walls that help with heat effects and also reduce toxins and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in environment
- Examine lawn requirements and determine if it makes continued sense to increase water usage to maintain a green lawn rather than a forested lawn in light of climate change
- Loosen the city restrictions on gravel roads or encourage other permeable road surfaces besides asphalt
- Examine all utilities including waste water, potable water, waste streams, etc. and how they all impact energy efficiency
- Encourage citizens to change their thinking to the long-term rather than the short-term
- Partner with landlords to install landlord-controlled thermostats which set high and low temperature limits in rental properties
- Increase choices in pricing so that consumers can choose to only buy solar instead of coal (although another participant indicated that this may not be legal in IN)
- Encourage ways to implement energy efficiencies in existing buildings, such as heating the floors rather than the air of buildings with high ceilings