



**Bloomington Sustainability Action Plan Open House
Meeting Notes
21 February 2018
City Hall McCloskey Room
4 pm – 6 pm**

Topic: Climate, Energy, and the Built Environment

Facilitator: Lisa Marie-Napoli

Easel/Note Pad: Allissa Aardema

Computer notes: Marla Cherney

Number of participants: 10-11

Summary of Interests Discussed

- Appreciation expressed for the prevalence of solar in Bloomington, the Monroe County Energy Challenge, hybrid and electric buses, city and organization efforts to increase the energy efficiency of homes, the presence of Indiana University, sustainably-conscious citizens, the existence of the Sustainability Action Plan project, and the Citizens' Climate Lobby
- Concerns expressed with the amount of suburban and urban sprawl in Bloomington, the prevalent usage of cars in such a small town, the disconnect between Bloomington public transit and surrounding rural transit systems, unsustainable practices by retail and food service businesses in Bloomington, the lack of usage of the existing green development initiatives, lack of support from the state of Indiana leads to tension between state and local sustainability practices, apartment dwellers in Bloomington have a lack of control over improving building standards for energy efficiency, no vision to address the integration between energy usage, utilities, and emissions, and the lack of funding for sustainable initiatives in Bloomington
- The group recommended improvements in greenhouse gas reporting mechanisms, downtown density rates, green development incentives for energy efficiency, media coverage of sustainability issues, stakeholder discourse about regulations, and awareness about the nexus between architectural design and sustainability issues
- Group recommended the creation of a micro greenhouse gas inventory and other metrics, a committee to facilitate energy efficiency in businesses, standardized electric vehicle infrastructure, and a comprehensive citywide vision for energy efficiency
- To achieve the goals, the group recommended changes to the electricity decreasing block pricing structure, time-use cost changes to electricity pricing, increased energy efficiency education, outreach to individuals in the community about the financial benefits of increased energy efficiency, inviting businesses into the regulatory process, targeting greenhouse gas emissions directly through conservation initiatives, and changing historic preservation policies to ensure energy efficiency standards can still be met

Detailed Notes

What is going well in Bloomington?

- Participants expressed satisfaction over the number of solar panels in Bloomington, including residential, business, and city efforts
- The success of the Monroe County Energy challenge helping people reduce energy usage in homes and the current expansion to help businesses
- Past efforts by the city of Bloomington, HAND, SIREN, the Bloomington Homebuyers club and other organizations, such as churches, that have helped those owning and renting property to improve energy efficiency
- The Bloomington public transit system and its transition to hybrid and electric buses
- The presence and influence of Indiana University with its environmental programs, ideas, and leadership in sustainability initiatives
- One participant noted that Bloomington is special in that the city has a very sustainability-conscience population which many communities do not have, with hundreds of people who live and work in the area who are not engaged in the field of sustainability and yet still value sustainable principles in their day-to-day lives
- The presence of the Citizens' Climate Lobby, which began in Bloomington and has spread throughout Indiana
- Another participant noted that the number of interested and motivated individuals in the city have created many ideas about sustainability in Bloomington
- The very fact that the Sustainability Action Plan process is happening shows the willingness of Bloomington to take action and commit to sustainability

What is not going so well in Bloomington?

- Increasing suburban and urban sprawl could detract from maintaining the integrity of the built environment in the future as well as energy efficiency issues
- Lack of access for getting into and around the community which causes a lot of car traffic in a fairly small town
- One participant noted that Bloomington public transportation does not line up with rural transit systems, making it difficult for students to travel to and from Ivy Tech and other nearby schools without personal transportation due to limited public transportation options
- Businesses in Bloomington, especially those in retail and food services lack sustainable practices such as avoiding Styrofoam take-out containers, using grease interceptors, and energy efficient transportation systems
- Bloomington leaves individual businesses to make sustainability decisions on their own without incentives or penalties for not providing recycling, making energy efficiency improvements, cutting back on plastic usage, etc.
- One participant shared an experience with the planning department in Bloomington, who informed them that the green development initiatives in place are rarely used and that the department does not track any usage that does occur
- Bloomington is in Indiana, which means that any sustainability practices are either not supported or outright banned, such as the retraction of net-metering practices and disallowing plastic bag bans
- This annexation and shutdown of environmental practices, especially those impacting the built environment, create tension between state and local governments and projects
- Sustainability in Bloomington is separated by class in that those who have sufficient resources have the financial ability to act sustainably, but those without those resources are excluded from taking similar action, such as making energy efficiency upgrades

- One participant estimated that 60% of the community lives in apartment complexes with very little control over energy efficiency measures and upgrades to their buildings and remain reliant upon landlords to undertake large energy efficient projects
- One participant commented that the city seems to have little vision for how all sustainability aspects are integrated with regards to energy and emissions, which is clear and reflected in the city's focus on simply installing solar panels rather than also improving energy efficiency in the city
- Bloomington has limited funding for sustainability, which leads to coordinating many small projects without considering larger, long-term goals
- Lack of affordable housing in Bloomington and new houses being built are very large, leading to inefficient energy consumption in the city
- One participant indicated that misleading information from local news casts sustainability issues in a dismissive way

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

- Set up a direct mechanism for estimating the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions in Bloomington by fine-tuning existing mechanisms from other cities or regions
- Need a good mechanism for reporting information about the recent macro inventory update from last summer because many individuals are not aware that this report is available
- Create a micro inventory approach to give a specific number to each household containing a measurement of their input and output of greenhouse gases, such as the number of BTU usage per year
- Embrace density downtown in public planning by expanding building heights to over four stories or not pursuing new parking garages in favor of other transportation initiatives
- Develop incentives to make them more effective by increasing buy-in to reduce overall costs
- The city should do greater exploration into how incentives are created and make them more useful for the scale needed and appeal to all types of development projects, not just housing
- Create a committee to facilitate energy efficiency in all types of business
- Begin preparing the city for electric vehicles and work with Indianapolis and surrounding counties to coordinate charging stations in the surrounding areas to encourage greater use of electric vehicles in IN
- Increase city-wide composting and enforce those policies to reduce emissions
- One participant suggested a need to work with newspapers so that they are in "our corner" for sustainability issues and do a better job advocating with better reporting of those issues
- Create regulations that make landlords pay attention to energy efficiency issues, especially in apartment buildings
- Create a city-wide and specific vision for overall energy efficiency in Bloomington
- Create quality discourse and appropriate recommendations for new energy projects, such as whether the new substation project is truly necessary and how to achieve new energy demand projects more in line with sustainable practices
- Use metrics to provide a base for further project development and implementation
- Use metrics to help the community see the accomplishments and the direction the city is taking with respect to sustainability
- Encourage the involvement of all stakeholders who produce, regulate, consume, and work with energy to make realistic sustainable changes
- Increase community or group solar energy projects, although another participant noted this may not be legal in IN
- Increase energy efficiency incentives/programs in a similar timeframe to install solar panels to negate increased energy usage from decreasing cost of electricity to create the most effective energy changes
- Create a policy which requires buildings performing renovations to add green standards such as solar panels or green roofs
- Find out how Bloomington compares to other similarly sized cities and follow the best practices utilized in those regions to make changes to sustainability practices

- Identify what makes Bloomington attractive to companies and visitors and work with the planning commission to increase the power of our sustainability plan and enjoy quality of life alongside sustainability
- One participant noted that while change is good, the city should be careful to not change too fast and perhaps lose what makes Bloomington a special place
- Keep sustainability renovations to the built environment in line with architecture of the city to prevent “pedestrian, uninspired, and sometimes downright ugly” public spaces, which leads to less people walking or biking
- Invest in good architecture in the built environment, not just for sustainability purposes but also for public safety and to create non-disposable, lasting buildings which increase efficiency simply by continuing to have useful lives over 50-100 years
- Increase energy efficiency by retrofitting old buildings in ways which also preserve culture, history, architecture, and quality
- Recognize that designers have less control over buildings than owners and regulators and work within IN state residential codes to find legal new best practices
- Get youth involved in sustainability projects since students have far more power than city employees and education initiates making changes in the future through the city’s youth
- One participant suggested working with in and out-of-state groups to lobby Indiana to make changes at the state level
- Collaborate with schools, especially to reduce energy prices and efficiency within school districts to help balance budgets and generate increased public support for energy efficiency projects
- Collaborate with the planning, chamber of commerce, and economic development departments to increase participation of stakeholders with financial or economic interest in sustainability projects
- Figure out which populations sustainability initiatives put at a disadvantage in the marketplace and try to level the playing field during the transition so that some companies are not paying regulatory fees that they cannot afford
- Incentivize affordable housing alongside sustainable development

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

- Work with Duke Energy to change the decreasing block prices of energy which encourages people to use more energy and decreases returns on renewable energy
- Work with the IN Utility Regulatory Commission to change the rate structure for electric utilities and prepare for regulatory changes regarding solar energy
- Work with Duke Energy to put forward time of use cost of electricity to encourage use during certain periods and educate people on the new pricing structure
- Increase energy efficiency reporting and education in the community
- Increase outreach to individuals in the city to inform them about the returns on investment they can make by adopting energy efficiency practices
- Integrate commercial and development business owners into incentive and regulatory creation progress to determine the most efficient ways to move forward with sustainability practices
- Add a requirement to the planning process that businesses, developers, and home buyers meet with an advisor from the sustainability committee to get information about energy efficient practices and available incentives
- Get feedback from stakeholders during the planning process regarding why they are not utilizing existing green development incentives
- Include realtors in sustainability planning to encourage people to buy houses in the city rather than always outside of it
- Increase research into geothermal to supplement solar power during non-peak solar hours
- Directly target greenhouse gas emissions reductions through conservation initiatives such as a turn off the light campaign or by installing motion detection lights in city hall

- Apply technology-controlled lighting, cooling, heating, etc. and other new innovations to increase efficiency when people forget to use energy efficient practices
- While lighting in neighborhoods helps with safety issues, determine where lighting is in excess, both inside and outside buildings to increase energy efficiency in public spaces
- Balance competing interests and paradoxes through dialogue, education, and interest-based negotiations among stakeholders and determine tradeoffs by working to find common values among groups
- Address density issues by building in empty spaces downtown
- Get the art community involved to design billboards that promote an “issue of the month” and address concerns such as energy efficiency or bike safety
- Create a sustainability app for the city to engage the younger populations with safety and sustainability education
- Increase the focus on mixed use neighborhoods to encourage sustainable practices at the macro level, rather than only individual level
- Redesign historic preservation policies to make sure that energy efficiency retrofitting is allowed in historic buildings