

ACHIEVING REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

AMIR W. AL-KHAFAJI¹, SESHADRI GUHA², and LAITH AL-KHAFAJI²

¹*Dept of Civil Engineering and Construction, Bradley University, Peoria, USA*

²*CGN Global, Peoria, USA*

The mayor of Peoria constituted the Peoria Sustainability Commission (PSC) in late 2008 with the mission “To transform Peoria into a community that promotes social equity, green economy, and a healthy environment through policy development, incentives, and initiatives to sustain a quality way of life.” The Commission utilized a unique breakthrough model, which brought together members from diverse backgrounds, functions, expertise, and viewpoints to form a shared vision. The group started with fewer than ten leaders within the community but has now grown to more than 30 members and continues to attract the movers and shakers in the region. The PSC was divided into six subcommittees, which formulated ideas and recommendations targeted towards improving sustainability for their focus areas and enlisting the help of the business community. The Peoria model diverges from traditional models in that it deployed actionable strategy and eliminates silos inherent in most commissions. The core objective was to develop an action plan, commission structure, and seeking feedback and guidance from stakeholders to inspire new ways of thinking. The critical changes identified included moving the PSC focus from a local Peoria-centric model to a regional model and to modify the Commission structure to cross-functional teams to better adapt to future development in the social, environmental and economic areas. The action plan, structure, targets, and PSC achievements are presented in this paper.

Keywords: Peoria sustainability, Commission, Social, Economic, Environmental, Business, Model, Silos.

1 OVERVIEW

The definition of sustainability from the Brundtland report (UN World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) is widely quoted as “*sustainable development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*” Another common definition is the traditional diagram shown in Figure 1.

The three-legged stool of Social, Ecological and Economic of sustainability reveal linkages between the three areas that require a degree of balance for any community to sustain itself. Sustainability and sustainable development may vary widely from negative to very positive. Equating sustainability with limited sustainable development and increasing costs associated with social equity may not be sustainable. Kasun and Jacqueline (1999) argues that sustainable development requires sacrificing human freedom, dignity, and material welfare. Bailey (2002) suggests that preserving the environment, limiting economic growth, and eradicating poverty, are incompatible. He states that economic growth actually protects the environment as shown by the environmental quality of wealthier nations. Beckerman (1992) argues that economic growth for

developing countries is the best strategy to reduce environmental degradation and strain on resources.

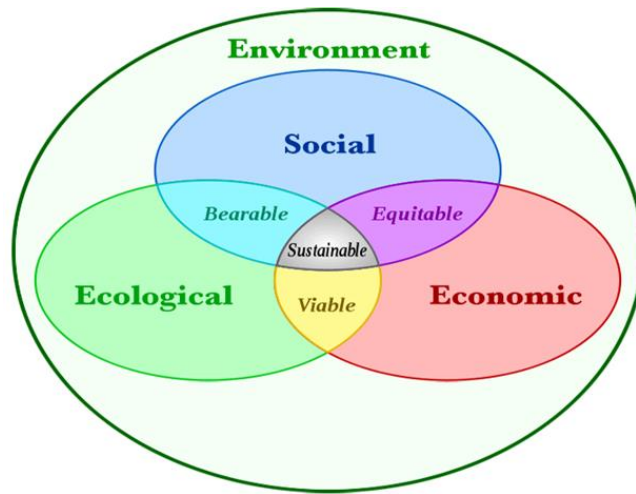


Figure 1. Diagram defining sustainability.

The stimulus for forming the Peoria Sustainability Commission (PSC) was the recognition of a need for collaborative neighborhoods and communities and partnerships between business leaders and government official to help create a better future. This was achieved by thinking beyond everyone’s immediate need and developing mechanisms to achieve long-term objectives. For example, when commissioner sought input from community leaders regarding improvements to the educational system, the initial response was that this would take 30 years to achieve. The commission’s position was that someone said the same thing 30 years ago! The implication was that the PSC discovered early on the need for public education and to develop both short-term and long-term strategies to achieve a sustainable community in central Illinois and beyond.

2 THE PSC STRUCTURE

The PSC structure was developed with a holistic approach as the guiding principle. It relied on solicitation of input from the stakeholders from cross-functional representatives, various age groups, and leaders in the Peoria community and beyond.

The recommended structure includes three types of groups: Commission Executive (CE), Commission Group (CG), and Community Partner (CP). The overall structure involves four major commission groups focused on Environment, Transportation, Development, and Social issues and initiatives. The Community Partners are involved in Policies, Codes & Standards, Incentives, Resources & Grants, Metrics & Economic Analysis, and Education, Awareness & Branding work as shown in Figure 2.

Clearly, the city can impact directly policies, codes, standards, incentives, resources, grants and those that should originate from other areas in the city neighborhood, business, church, etc. As the work of the commission evolved, the commission flexible structure enabled it to evolve and pivot based on lessons learned while remaining steadfast in the pursuit of its objectives.

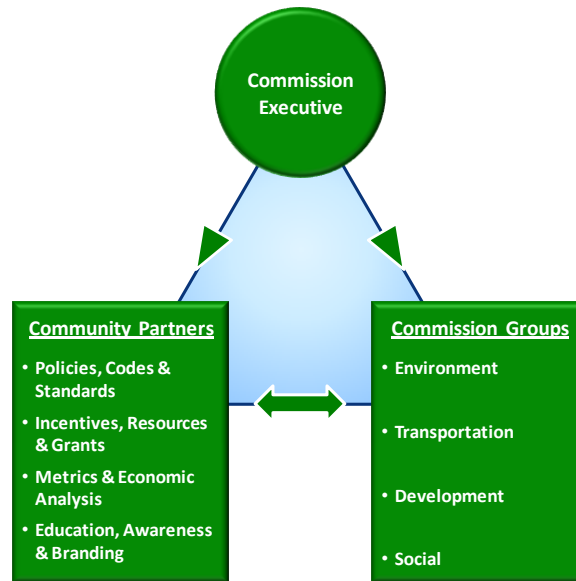


Figure 2. Overview of the Peoria sustainability commission.

3 THE PSC TARGET AND GROUPS

The PSC primary target is to provide overall strategy, vision, and direction while ensuring integration and alignment between all groups. The PSC is also to develop a framework to identify and drive synergies across groups and facilitate open communication and conflict resolution. The Peoria Sustainability Commission is focused on the three main areas traditionally associated with sustainability as follows:

- a. Social
 - i. Citizen Physical and Mental Health {Work with hospitals to get specific targets; obesity, preventable disease rate, access to care, etc.}
 - ii. Crime Rate {Work with police and neighborhoods to set specific targets; violent crime, drugs, neighborhood watch, etc.}
 - iii. Socially Attractive Environment {Complete streets, pocket parks, access to nature, local food, etc.}
 - iv. Equity / Diversity {DBE focus, education, etc.}
- b. Economic
 - i. Jobs {Set specific targets; double downtown jobs}
 - ii. Training {improve availability of qualified labor force through education grants, etc.}
 - iii. Sustainable city development {revamp city design; transit oriented development, public transportation, increased urban density, self-sustaining sectors, etc.}
- c. Environmental
 - i. Green Buildings {specific goals for all}

- ii. Clean Water / Clean Air
- iii. Zero Waste

Each commission group is focused on its specific areas but all possess the same high-level roles and responsibilities to drive the PSC towards achieving its short-term and long-term objectives as shown in Figure 3.

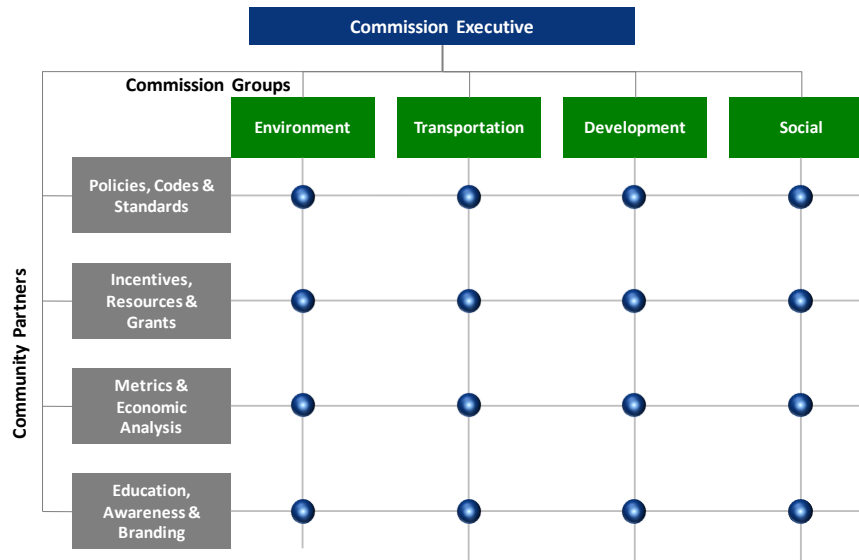


Figure 3. The Peoria commission structure.

To enhance the evaluation process, commissioner is responsible for leveraging the expertise of all partners to better understand the opportunities and implications. Thus, understanding the impact each recommendation has on the other commissioners is critical both to identify and leverage synergies and to avoid recommendations that would be detrimental on the broader scale. Achieving consensus on the final deliverables is expected to require multiple feedback and revision iterations. Each commissioner is responsible for

- Identifying the critical success factors and drivers associated with its area.
- Evaluating relevant recommendations and ideas as well as identifying new opportunities for improving sustainability in the region.
- Classifying each recommendation as either short, mid, or long-term.
- Assessing each recommendation on the basis of economic feasibility, alignment to sustainability goals and impact.
- Identifying key stakeholders required to drive execution of each recommendation.

Community Partners have a specialized area of focus and expertise but roles and responsibilities are consistent at a high-level. Due to unique requirements, capabilities and opportunities across stakeholders, each partner will contribute in to the development of roles and responsibilities as follows:

- Collaborate with other partners and commissioners to provide expertise and support

- Identify synergies and potential conflicts between commissioners and partners, promoting synergies and offering advice on resolving conflicts.
- Provide specific recommendations and identify critical community, governmental, and corporate stakeholders at both the region and local level.

The overall meeting and reporting structure maintains regular schedule to meet specific opportunities and needs. Individual groups holding additional meetings to accomplish their objectives. In addition, several brainstorming sessions with the entire commission are held to drive alignment, inter-group discussion, and conflict resolution.

4 THE PSC ACHIEVEMENTS

The achievements attained by the Peoria Sustainability commission are significant and widespread in the areas outlined in Figure 3. Clearly, any action in one area impacts all other areas. For example, when the price of gasoline goes up people tend to seek carpooling, which create opportunities for a more robust social interaction and drive innovations for cheaper sources of energy and cleaner air quality because fewer cars are being driven. Some of the PSC achievements thus far include the following:

- We hold an annual conference (<http://icat.bradley.edu>) to bring leaders from business, government, and education with a focus on infrastructure. The Innovations Conference in Construction, Asphalt and Transportation attracts global leaders with more than 20 VIP events held during the conference. One of the events invites 50 leaders to meet annually to discuss issues and problems of Statewide, national and international importance. Last year one of the VIP events dealt with a new capital bill for Illinois totaling more than \$30 billion and addressed sustainable funding of infrastructure.
- Students from various central Illinois school districts are invited annually to a major conference on infrastructure (<http://icat.bradley.edu>) with funding provided by businesses from across the State of Illinois. This two-day conference provides unique opportunities for underprivileged students to interact with business leaders, elected policymakers and government official. It inspires students to seek a better future with many receiving summer job opportunities and internships. Grants and scholarship are provided to deserving and needy students. The school district, churches, and charities are enlisted as partners in this effort. The level of financial support for students continues to grow because sponsors have opportunities to see first hand the impact of their generosity and commitment.
- Women and Minority businesses benefitted greatly from being associated with the PSC by receiving exposure and access to world-class businesses through workshops and special events to meet special needs by enlisting the help of business leaders. In 2016, a “Speed Dating” event was held for the first time where minority firms were matched with global companies to produce new partnerships and joint venture between large and small businesses.
- Economic Development includes reclamation projects in the downtown area of Peoria with many new warehouse district development, riverfront, and brownfields. On the Riverfront the list includes a new Caterpillar Inc. Visitor Center, a museum, new residential riverfront complexes, and a proposed Caterpillar World Headquarter.

- The City of Peoria is in the process of meeting its federal mandate by utilizing the sustainability commission to propose a sustainable green solution to a \$200 million combined sewer overflow project. The city proposal includes permeable pavements and other green technologies to meet Federal requirements. According to the US department in charge of this effort, the Peoria proposal is one of its kind and will set the groundwork for similar projects elsewhere in the USA.
- The PSC continues to host delegations from across the globe to seek new investments in Peoria and Central Illinois. In January 2017, we hosted a delegation from China interested in building facilities to harvest Asian carp to be exported back to China.
- Researchers from Bradley University are collaborating with the University of Illinois on many transportation projects and with the Tri-County commission to meet cleaner air standards required by the US government.
- To create a safer environment and goodwill, the Sustainability Commission embarked on building several community projects. The list includes developments in the south side part of Peoria by transforming garbage dumps into beautiful pocket parks with the help of volunteers and citizens from these same neighborhoods.

The above provides only a partial list of the many achievements and accomplishments of the Peoria Sustainability Commission. The Commission composition and strategy continues to grow and develop to better meet needs of the stakeholders.

5 CONCLUSION

The model developed by the Peoria Sustainability Commission to help secure a better future for central Illinois continues to evolve and improve based on the degree of success achieved and input received from stakeholders. The flexible structure of the commission permits proper changes in commission membership based on lessons learned, but remains steadfast in the pursuit of its objectives. A major task currently being pursued by the commission is the \$200 million combined sewer overflow projects that will impact social, economic, and ecological areas of sustainability. Steps are being taken to ensure that minority and women owned firms play a role in the project. Permeable pavements and other green technologies will involve major businesses from across the State of Illinois and beyond. The PSC is positioned to achieve greater heights and to secure a better future for our community.

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