

From: SustainLane Government
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Advancing Sustainability

March 22, 2007

Greetings!

Welcome to the latest issue of [SustainLane Government's](#) newsletter. This issue features a special interview with Minneapolis sustainability coordinators, Gayle Prest and Daniel Huff, as well as an excerpt from the 2005 Minneapolis Sustainability Report.

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What's New? Green Summit! Planetizen!



SustainLane Government spent last week at the [California Green Summit](#) in Sacramento, which was the first state-level expo for sustainability policies, products and services. Warren Karlenzig of SustainLane presented

on the sustainability ranking of California cities, and we met with many public officials who were eager to share stories about how cities are greening up. If you're one of the many government professionals we talked to last week, welcome



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aboard!

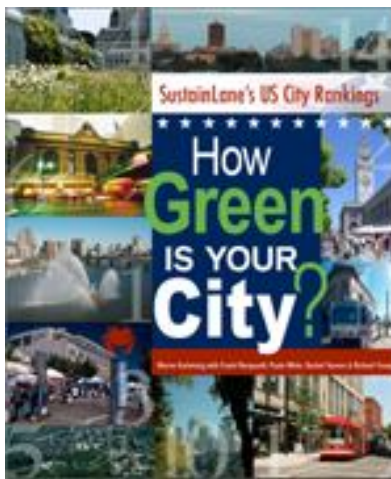
While at Green Summit, we also learned that the urban planning resource, Planetizen, recently named SustainLane Government a [Top 10 Website of 2007](#). We're truly honored to be listed alongside such excellent online resources as:

The [Active Living Network](#), which correlates land-use to measures of physical health by showing that better planning of physical spaces creates increased opportunity for athletics and, well, active living.

[Louisiana Speaks](#), a clearinghouse for regional and local agencies, planners and residents to support the rebuilding of areas destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The site promotes sustainable redevelopment of New Orleans and the coastline in general by working with nature, not against it.

How Green Is Your City?

We're delighted to announce the upcoming publication on April 22nd (Earth Day) of *How Green Is Your City?* which is based on our benchmarking study of the fifty largest cities in the US. The study, known as the SustainLane US City Rankings, systematically examines our biggest cities against vital indicators to rate their current quality-of-life performance, economic durability, and preparedness for future uncertainties.



How Green Is Your City expands the core research of the US City Rankings into an easy-to-reference guidebook that takes the reader on a tour of the nation to see which cities are stuck in the endangered present and which cities are taking those crucial steps toward the long term. The foreword is by best-selling sustainability author Paul Hawken. For more info, go to www.howgreenisyourcity.us or [SustainLane Government](#).

"A hundred million little issues": an interview with Minneapolis sustainability coordinators

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Recently, SustainLane Government chatted with Minneapolis sustainability coordinators Gayle Prest and Daniel Huff. Published below is an excerpt from the interview; the full text

can be found on SustainLane Government.

SustainLane Government (SLG): What is Minneapolis' experience with sustainability? How did it all get started?

Gayle Prest: Starting in 2001 we had a major changeover in policy makers, and that's when a lot more emphasis was put on environmental issues in general, not just sustainability.

We have what's called an Environmental Coordinating Team, which is made up of key department heads. It meets quarterly. In 2001 the policy-makers started attending that for the first time. They started asking a lot of good questions about performance measures and results, and key focuses. We set up key teams within the different departments in areas that we wanted to look at, and came up with the first environmental report card.

In 2003 we adopted a resolution that started the Minneapolis Sustainability Plan. We integrated [sustainability] into our Comprehensive Plan. We also created sustainability indicators to determine how we measure progress.

We had a couple of roundtables with interested citizens, and based on their input, the city adopted 24 indicators and directed staff to go back and set up numerical targets. We're not just about reducing Global Warming or increasing [high school] graduation rates. We want [departments] to actually set up targets on these, determine baselines, and report on these issues every year on what we've done to meet them.

SLG: How are you structured?

Daniel Huff: One of the conscious decisions made was that, rather than setting up a department of sustainability or department of the environment, the structure is such that it pushes the responsibility back down to each department.

So, Gayle and I coordinate the sustainability program within the departments, but we don't manage it or direct it. We work with departments to see how they will respond to the council direction of incorporating sustainability into their departmental business plans and departmental work plans.

Gayle: I think it forces departments look outside their silos. When I talked to other sustainability directors across the country, I think there's an agreement that when you talking about sustainability, you're asking people to get outside the silos of their department. Probably the best example that we can give that people can relate to is: trees.

Daniel: Lots of different departments touch trees in some way or the other. Planning and zoning, in their ordinances, can require more trees. Public works--whenever they repave streets, redo sidewalks, put in stormwater facilities--can begin to look at how can we use trees within that. How do we align the utilities that we're putting down on the sidewalk now to accommodate trees later? So, it's a matter of making sure departments are integrated.

Gayle: Like the Fire Department--usually you wouldn't think the Fire Department was involved with trees. But when it's really dry they can go out there and water them. We have a forestry division on our Minneapolis Park and Recreation board, but what we were trying to do is let everyone know that they have an effect on trees. So that's forcing the outside-the-box thinking: what can your department do about the city's desire to increase the urban tree canopy? It also gets down to what kind of chemicals are our field services crew using, and how does that affect trees?

Go to [SustainLane Government](#) for the rest of the interview.



Featured Best Practice: Minneapolis Sustainability Annual Report

We've excerpted below two short sections from the Minneapolis Sustainability Initiative's Annual Report (2005), which is an excellent summary of the city's progress across 24 indicators. The full document is available at [SustainLane Government](#).



Executive Summary

Creating a more sustainable, healthy and environmentally-friendly city is a top priority for Minneapolis leaders. To set a road map for making Minneapolis truly sustainable, the Minneapolis City Council and Mayor R.T. Rybak started integrating sustainability principles into City decision-making by developing a Sustainability Report in 2003. An extensive public process followed, including roundtable discussions, expert testimony and resident committee review. The City Council formally adopted these 24 sustainability indicators in March 2006. The indicators were selected as quantifiable measures that represent the values of the community. They are snapshots of individual issues that – taken together – give a big picture perspective on the health and vitality of Minneapolis.

This Sustainability Report is a result of that initial planning

and significant public discussions and input from residents, community leaders, policy experts, City officials and other stakeholders. The report evaluates our progress towards sustainability both inside the City enterprise and in Minneapolis' community of residents and businesses.

The report includes goals, targets and strategies for both City government and the community to conserve local resources, protect human health, maintain a healthy economy and improve our quality of life. It is intended to serve as a foundation for civic activism and future policy decisions. Residents, policy-makers and City staff will use it to begin thinking, planning and acting more sustainably. The indicators are a quick way to measure progress, but more importantly to inspire critical thinking about our priorities and the impacts of our behaviors. They are a way to help us think about the future while making decisions about the present. A sustainable Minneapolis is the most important legacy we can leave for future generations.

This document, the first of intended annual reports, is primarily focused on introducing the indicators, targets and baseline information and providing a snapshot of work done in 2005 toward accomplishing these targets. The report will be updated and delivered to the City Council each June. In future years, there will be more of a focus on trend analysis and progress toward goals.

These sustainability targets set quantifiable performance goals, measure real progress toward these goals and hold policymakers and the general public accountable for the city's sustainability. Baseline information has been or is being gathered to capture the current levels of performance, complete with graphs illustrating historical data where possible. Trend analysis, critical to determining if we are headed in the right direction, has been provided where data are available.

The data presented are our best effort to provide a current statistical snapshot of each indicator. The vast majority of requested data were successfully collected and included in the report, but there were limitations for this first report. Some data are simply not currently collected or publicly available. Staff will continue to collect information to update the online version of the indicators through 2006. Stronger baseline data on energy consumption are being collected for the Carbon Dioxide and Renewable Energy indicators. Targets and baseline data will be established in 2006 for the Homelessness

indicator and the Workers Earn a Livable Wage indicator. Because this primary information was not yet established, the activities and historical data for these indicators are incomplete.

Summary of the 24 indicators and trends, where available:

Affordable Housing

City government plays an important role by ensuring that people at lower income levels have access to housing that is safe and affordable. Minneapolis has set and met aggressive goals for increasing investment in affordable housing – particularly rental housing – over the past several years.

AIDS and Gonorrhea Rate

AIDS and gonorrhea are two of the most serious sexually transmitted diseases. Infection rates for both AIDS and gonorrhea have declined over the past five years. Racial and ethnic disparities for both diseases are declining as well.

Air Quality

Air quality in Minneapolis is among the best of major metropolitan areas in the United States. Still, the number of “unhealthy” days is increasing. Formaldehyde levels (from auto, truck and small-engine exhaust) have exceeded health benchmarks regionally for more than a decade, and they continue to rise.

Airport Noise and Impacts

Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport plays an important role in our economy but also generates environmental impacts such as noise. While individual planes are becoming quieter, air traffic levels and overall noise are increasing significantly.

Asthma Morbidity

Asthma has been associated with a variety of indoor and outdoor air quality factors. Hospitalization rates for children under five have decreased in the last five years. Overall hospitalization rates are largely unchanged.

Bicycle Lanes and Trails

Biking is good for our health, economy and environment, and the City can play a key role by building and maintaining bike lanes and paths in our streets and commuter bike routes. Minneapolis has steadily added bike lanes and paths and has an active resident advisory committee guiding the process. In

spite of cold weather challenges, the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau Supplemental Survey named Minneapolis the number one bicycle commuting city in America.

Block Clubs

Encouraging block club participation is a critical piece of Minneapolis' crime prevention and public safety strategy. Minneapolis has been a leader in block club participation and has the top-ranked National Night Out for several years.

Brownfield Sites – Land Recycling

Brownfields are former commercial or industrial properties that are difficult to redevelop because of actual or suspected soil contamination. Minneapolis was among the first cities in the country to recycle land by cleaning it up for redevelopment, open spaces and parks.

Carbon Dioxide

Increasing levels of carbon dioxide, primarily from fossil fuel emissions, are warming the planet. This poses significant environmental and economic threats throughout the world. Improved data collection is needed.

Combined Sewer Overflow

Heavy rains can make sewer pipes overflow into adjoining stormwater pipes, which can drain untreated rainwater and raw sewage into the Mississippi River. This is called a combined sewer overflow (CSO), and it can cause serious health and environmental problems. CSOs have dramatically decreased in recent years as the City has been working with property owners and the Metropolitan Council to steadily separate the stormwater and sanitary sewer systems.

Downtown Transportation Alternatives

Taking alternative transportation is good for our health, economy and the environment. The City plays an important role in making alternative transit, such as bussing, biking and walking, affordable and convenient and promoting its use. The use of alternative transportation in downtown Minneapolis has steadily decreased since 1958 as our dependence on the automobile has increased. Light rail use has exceeded expectations in its first year, but it is too soon to evaluate its long-term impact.

Graduation Rate from Minneapolis Public Schools

The high school graduation rate is a critical measure of a community's success. City government, though not primarily responsible for schools, can play an important role in

increasing the graduation rate by partnering with schools, residents and employers. The graduation rate at Minneapolis' seven largest public high schools increased slightly between 2004 and 2005. The graduation rate for African- American students decreased slightly, while graduation rates for other races and ethnicities increased slightly.

Healthy Weight

Two key measures of a community's general health involve a healthy weight: a healthy birth weight for infants and maintaining healthy weights for adults. The proportion of babies born at a low birth weight has changed little in the last five years. African-American babies make up the highest proportion, followed by Native American babies. Diet and exercise are the predominant factors associated with healthy weight in adults.

Homelessness

Homelessness is a critical issue that affects individuals, families and children. An important staff position was created last year to coordinate City and county homelessness efforts and develop a strategy to end homelessness.

Homicide

Violent crime rates are a very visible area of concern when a community assesses the state of public safety. In response to this concern in Minneapolis, the City has increased collaboration with criminal justice agencies, community groups and corporate partners, focusing on seizing guns and reducing gang violence. The Police Department maintains a commitment to youth, community and cultural understanding programs and initiatives as important components of violence prevention efforts.

Infant Mortality Rate

Infant mortality is defined as death from any cause during the first year of a baby's life. The Infant Mortality Rate is an internationally established marker of population health that reflects maternal conditions and social factors. The Minneapolis infant mortality rate has declined significantly over the last decade, and racial disparities have decreased. African Americans and Native Americans, followed by Hispanics, have the highest infant mortality rates.

Lead Testing of Children

Childhood lead poisoning is one of the most common, yet preventable, health problems in the United States. There has been a significant increase in testing children for lead

poisoning between 2000 and 2004.

Permeable Surfaces

The most important actions a resident can take to improve overall water quality in Minneapolis are to slow down stormwater runoff, reduce its volume and improve the water's quality before it goes into the City's storm sewers. The City established a new stormwater utility fee system to encourage property owners to adopt environmentally friendly ways of handling stormwater. Now more residents and businesses are installing rain gardens, green roofs and pervious pavers that allow storm water to absorb into the ground instead of washing into the sewers. Over the last year, the City has also increased the numbers of amenities such as ponds, wetlands and rain gardens, as well as underground treatment chambers and green roofs.

Renewable Energy

In the face of global warming, harmful pollution levels and skyrocketing fossil fuel costs, it is critical to increase our use of renewable energy. Baseline information on the City's operational use of renewable energy, as well as citywide use of renewable energy is currently being collected.

Students in the Arts

Arts education improves academic achievement and provides lifelong resources for students and the community as a whole.

Teen Pregnancy Rate

The teen pregnancy rate is an important measure of youth development that affects individuals and society, both short- and long-term. Teen pregnancy rates have decreased among all racial and ethnic groups with the exception of Hispanics in the last four years.

Urban Tree Canopy

Our urban forest reduces air pollution, provides habitat for wildlife, limits water runoff and cools our homes. The City has planted an average of 3,200 trees per year on public property during this period to combat tree losses.

Water Quality

Keeping our lakes, streams and rivers clean is critical to maintaining a safe and healthy urban environment. From 1996 to 2005, water clarity has improved or stayed relatively the same for Lake Calhoun, Cedar Lake, Lake Harriet, Wirth Lake and Brownie Lake, Lake Hiawatha, Lake of the Isles, Loring Pond, Lake Nokomis, Powderhorn Lake and Webber

Pond. Clarity has deteriorated slightly during the same period for Spring Lake.

Workers Earning a Living Wage

When workers earn enough to support themselves and provide for their families' basic needs, the entire community benefits. Minneapolis can set an important example in the way the City conducts its business. The City passed a Living Wage Ordinance in 2005 ensuring that companies doing significant business with the City pay their employees a living wage.

For this Report in its entirety, go to [SustainLane Government](#).

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