

PLANNING

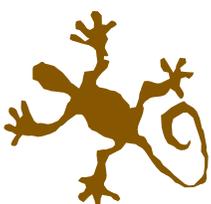


MAY/JUNE 2001

DRIVING TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY: "ARE WE THERE YET, DAD?" A PLANNER'S PERSPECTIVE ON ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Charlie Deans, AICP

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of planning terms such as Sustainable Development, Green Building, Regenerative Development, New Urbanism, Livable Communities, Smart Growth, New Ruralism, Green Urbanism, Traditional Neighborhood Development,... there are probably more, since it seems a new buzzword is created every few months. While there are differences between these concepts and their approaches, there are a great deal more similarities. Whatever the label, the intent is to improve the quality of our built and natural environments, whether in a rural or urban context, for present and future generations.



There will not be one single panacea for the planning of our communities. As different as all communities are, any of the above approaches will have their merits for a given situation.

So what do they mean to planners who are responsible for preparing and/or reviewing general plans, rezonings or subdivisions?

"We did not inherit the earth from our parents, we are borrowing it from our children"

— Chief Seattle



"Sustainability" is a term that perhaps most comprehensively embodies all of these approaches. A great deal of attention has been paid to defining and translating this concept the last several years. Webster defines sustainability as "...relating to or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged." The most-often quoted definition of "sustainable development" is from the World Commission on Environment and Development, which says it is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Another common description of sustainable development is to view our community as a three legged stool, with each leg representing the natural environment, the social/cultural environment and the economic environment; lose any leg and the stool collapses.

There is no clear understanding how this can be applied in our world of land use policies, rezonings

Theme For This Issue
"Sustainable Communities"

Continued on page 6



AGRITOPIA – SUSTAINABILITY FROM A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

By Joe Johnston, Agritopia

(Joe has spent three years in the design of Agritopia, a master planned community in Gilbert. Located on his family's farm, Agritopia includes twenty acres of urban organic farming, neo-traditional neighborhoods, commerce, schools, and offices. Further information regarding Agritopia may be found on his web site: www.agritopia.com.)

What is sustainability? Not being a professional planner, I guess I have an excuse for not having a very concise definition of the term. The concept of sustainability seems to revolve around the wise use of resources with an eye towards controlling waste. Furthermore, there is the idea of being able to function well into the future with minimal external inputs. When it comes to communities, I tend to think of some sort of an idealized Arcosanti-type design that is as self-sufficient as possible.

However, it is very difficult to design a truly self-sufficient community. Additionally, there is not general public acceptance of some of the more radical approaches, limiting marketability. As we began to think about the design of Agritopia, we considered several facets of sustainability that we thought possible to achieve. Being a farm, for instance, we decided that one pillar of the design would be sustainable urban agriculture. By converting a conventional farm growing two or three kinds of crops to a smaller, intensively cultivated organic farm with a cornucopia of fruits, vegetables, flowers, and herbs, we believe that it can remain in agriculture indefinitely. An entire article could be written on this topic, but there is an even more important type of sustainability that we have attempted to address – sustainability of human relationships within the community.

Ultimately, a home is a container for living life and at the heart of home life are the relationships one has with family and friends. The design of a home ought to conform to those things that foster and preserve relationships. Similarly, a community is a network of human relationships. The design of a community must, therefore, also consider how best to grow and sustain that network.

FIRST OF ALL, RELATIONSHIPS MUST BE FOSTERED
The design team of Agritopia attempted to foster



relationships by both breaking down traditional barriers to relationships and adding features that would encourage their formation. Traditional barriers found in subdivisions include compartmentalizing by income or status, streetscapes that are auto, not people friendly, sterile architecture, block walls between homes, and poor pedestrian connections within the community. On the other hand, a couple of features that can help set the stage for relationships are porches and “third places”.

BREAKING DOWN TRADITIONAL BARRIERS TO HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Compartmentalizing by income or status results in isolated blocks of starter homes, move-up homes, custom homes, and homes for retirees. The Agritopia plan breaks this mold by offering homes from 1,500 square feet to 4,500 square feet in the same neighborhood, without looking odd. The larger home has a 1,900 square foot main floor and basement plus a 700 square foot loft built into the trusses. The relative scale of the two homes remains pleasing to the eye. By offering this broad range of sizes (and prices), people from many walks of life can live on the same block, creating a more vibrant neighborhood.

Relationships within the community are not going to be forged while in a car. It is on foot that one is most likely to meet someone new or chat with the neighbor next door. Getting rid of auto oriented streetscapes and thinking first of pedestrians is the way to set this right.

The approach taken at Agritopia and in neo-traditional neighborhoods is to narrow the streets, add street trees in landscape strips that separate the street from the sidewalk, and provide an ample sidewalk. Garages dominating the front elevation of the house make for both an unattractive home and a large pad of concrete in the front yard. While cars are needed, the garages are placed in the back at Agritopia.

AGRITOPIA, *Continued from page 2*

Garage dominated front elevations are often grafted onto rather sterile, bland architecture. This contributes to a boring streetscape and gives the residents a certain sense of being just another number. They promote neither pedestrian activity nor a sense of belonging and pride in one's neighborhood. There are many ways to reintroduce real architecture into neighborhoods. Classic rules of proportion, scale, and massing can be applied to any number of styles. For Agritopia, we chose four distinct architec-



tural styles common in local neighborhoods built during the 1920's-1940's. Each style has detailing and four different color schemes consistent with that style. As a result, the home buyer has eighty home designs to choose from, creating a varied and interesting streetscape.

Arizona subdivisions are famous for their block walls. They create a certain fortress situation that tends to exclude neighbors. At Agritopia, we have replaced the walls with vinyl fences that are five feet high and pool safe. These fences delineate private space while allowing one to converse with a neighbor. There are no block walls planned within the community, even as a buffer between residential and commercial.

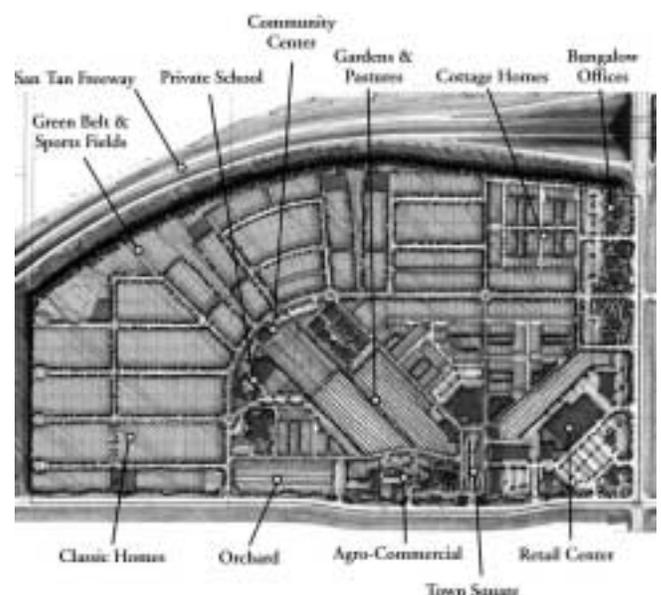
Walls between uses, aside from giving pedestrians little thought, results in a community with poor pedestrian connections. For instance, in most subdivisions one is required to exit the neighborhood and travel down an arterial to get to a grocery store even though the store might be right behind one's home. This forces people into cars. A major goal in the design of Agritopia was to provide for the basic

needs of the community within the project and ensure that they were easily accessible for pedestrians. To achieve this goal, we eliminated walls between uses and used landscaping or agricultural tracts as buffers, wove commercial, agricultural, and residential zonings together instead of separating them into blocks, and designed each pedestrian link to be interesting and reasonably shady in the summer.

ADDING FEATURES TO ENCOURAGE THE RELATIONSHIPS

Front porches help bring residents out of the privacy of the house or backyard and into the public space of the street. It should be noted that this is a useless exercise if the porch is unusable (not deep enough, small, or poorly shaded) or the streetscape is inhospitable. The usable front porch is a comfortable, semi-public transition zone that enables one to interact with passersby on the sidewalk. We think the porch should be set back from the edge of the sidewalk by only a few feet so that speaking to pedestrians can be done without shouting or straining.

Another powerful tool in setting the stage for human interaction is creating many "third places." Ray Oldenberg coined the term in his book "The Great Good Place." He examined places where people hung out – coffeehouses, pubs, cafes, and so on and observed that these places were particularly important in people's lives. The home is the "first place,"





COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

By Mike Milillo, City of Scottsdale Environmental Coordinator

The APA Policy Guide On Planning For Sustainability reports the following finding:

Patterns of human development — physical, social, and economic — affect sustainability at the local and the global level. Planning is integrally related to defining how, where, and when human development occurs. Planners can play a crucial role in improving the sustainability of communities and the resources that support them. By improving the sustainability of individual communities and regions, planners can also contribute to increased sustainability of global systems.

The Policy Guide goes on to define a number of policies including:

- The American Planning Association and its Chapters support planning policies and legislation encouraging participatory approaches to planning, including planning for sustainability, integrally involving local community residents in setting the vision for and developing plans and actions for their communities and regions.
- The American Planning Association and its Chapters support initiatives, including research and development of technology, that provide best available economic, social, and environmental data and indicators on impacts, alternatives, costs, and benefits for integrated decision-making at all levels of government.



Scottsdale's planners agree with APA's finding and actively promote its policies through the City's Sustainability Indicators Project. In 1998, the Sustainability Indicators Project initiated a process to define, evaluate and monitor those activities that contribute to community sustainability. With the support of city staff, about a dozen Scottsdale Board and Commission members (*Sustainability Indicators Working Group*), selected over forty different measures of community health and quality of life.

The Working Group focused on those activities that reflect community values as expressed in Scottsdale's Visioning and CityShape 2020 planning processes.



The sustainability indicators are monitoring and assessment tools that measure:

1. Change over a certain period of time.
2. Progress toward a given set of goals and objectives.

The Working Group's selection of indicators was also based on input from Scottsdale citizens using, among other instruments, the Annual Citizen Survey. Citizen responses emphasized education, air quality, open space preservation, park acreage, miles of bikeways and paths, population growth, land use, water use and unemployment as key local indicators of quality of life. Based on positive feedback received from the Mayor & City Council, Scottsdale staff began collecting data in 1999 on an initial list of 30 measures of community health and quality of life.

Scottsdale's indicators are divided into three categories: environmental, economic, and community. By its focus on society, environment, and economy as three overlapping systems, the sustainability-planning model acknowledges that each of the systems is connected to and dependent upon the others, especially in the long term.

The first indicators report was issued in 1999. In 2000, the second annual "Scottsdale Seeks Sustainability" report continued measuring Scottsdale's progress toward sustainability. The 2000 report incorporated three new indicators; one in each of the sections titled Environment, Economy and Community. Each of these report sections may be viewed as one of the functional systems that

Continued on page 5

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY, Continued
from page 4

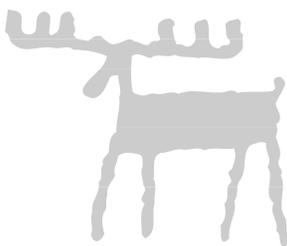
make up the community. Identifying and analyzing the linkages and interconnections among each of these systems is as important as the findings for each measure individually. You may access the 2000 Indicators Report at: <http://www.ci.scottsdale.az.us/environmental/Sustainable/AnnualReports/00WholeReport.pdf>

The Annual Indicators Report provides a framework for:

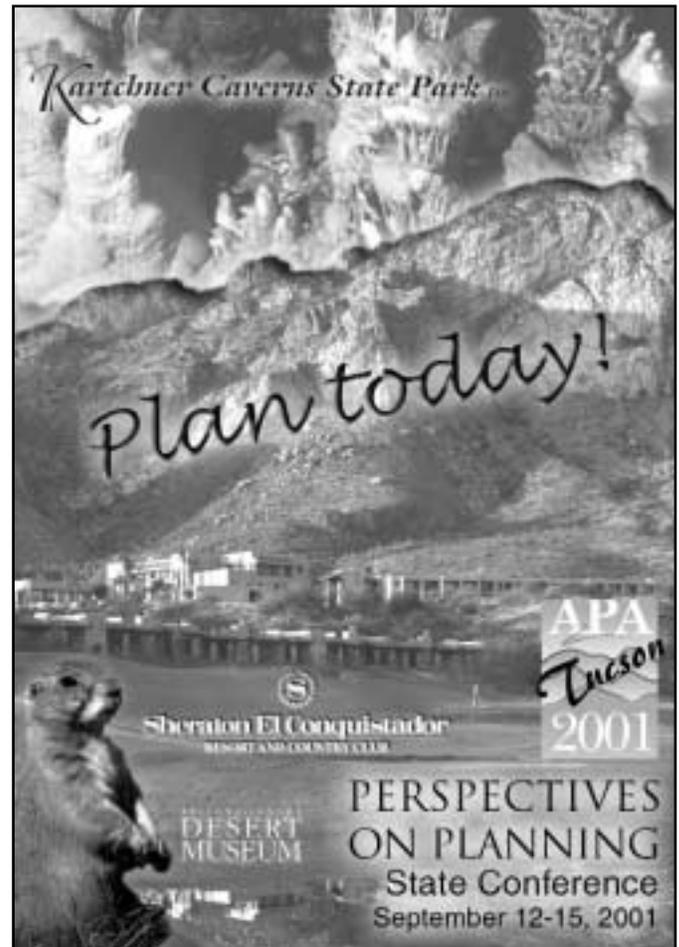
1. Organizing Information
2. Tracking Progress
3. Anticipating Problems
4. Building Collaborative Alliances

The indicators attempt to explain data on various topics of interest to the community and to give this data a context into which decision-makers, planners and the public will be able to put the numbers. Well-informed policy choices that take into consideration the fundamental links among the economy, the environment, and society will be more likely to result in actions that serve all three rather than one at the expense of the others. Local governments can achieve the greatest value from their measurement and improvement efforts when they align citizen engagement with efforts to manage for results, or more generally, when they align citizen engagement, performance measurement, and policy and implementation.

For a "Sneak Preview" of several of the 2001 Sustainability Indicators go to: <http://www.ci.scottsdale.az.us/environmental/Sustainable/Indicators/2001/Default.asp>



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