Hi All,
I sent the proposal below to Rachel, Donelle and Tim last week.
Rachel suggested we discuss it during discussion on feedback on the plan. I think it would speed up the discussion for you to read it before the meeting. It's about three pages, so it should be a fairly quick read.
John

Raison d'etre

Before Sustainability, before Six Sigma, before ISO 9000, and before Total Quality there was "raison d'etre". It isn't a management idea being marketed by some organizational guru; it's been around for centuries, and it simply means, reason for being.

What is the Sustainability Committee's reason for being? I think most of us can agree our participation in this group is to look toward a better long term future for Stoughton. The question that we've been wrestling with is how best to achieve this both at the city level and at the community level.

I would like to address two parts of this issue. First is structural, that is, how does sustainability get incorporated into the city's organizational structure. The second is the scope of the project: do we want to include just the city government or the entire community.

Structural

I personally think the city is doing a good job at looking at sustainability. Of course, I wish things would move faster, but at least they are moving in the right direction. They have done energy audits of their buildings and have included plans to improve them as budget restrictions allow. They have looked into hybrid and electric vehicles. All good stuff, and the city should be proud of what they have accomplished so far. Is there more they can do? Of course there is, but they are likely to do it with or without the Sustainability Committee.

So the question is, what is the Sustainability Committee's reason for being? If you say it is to publicize what the city has done and to honor the hard work the mayor and department heads have done, I'm all for that, but you don't need a committee to do that.

If you want to be certified by some accrediting organization as being a "sustainable" or "green" community, I can understand that. I'm not terribly impressed by it, but I can understand it. The reason I'm not sure writing a sustainability plan is the best use of our time and energy is because too many "plans" of all different varieties are written with the best of intentions, and then sit on a shelf never to be looked at again.

In a previous life, I was the quality manager of a manufacturing plant. My predecessor had spent over a year writing a quality manual as the basis for becoming ISO 9000 certified. Although a few of the items identified in the manual were instituted, most of it was ignored by both the management and production. Rather than trying to convince people to follow the system laid out in the manual, my approach was to identify the biggest problems and work to solve them. Solving the problems required working with production, engineering, suppliers and customers. In the end we had a great deal of success in reducing internal scrap, customer returns and had the best customer satisfaction of the company's five manufacturing plants -- better than those with ISO certification. Having a written sustainability plan may help implement sustainability, but it is no guarantee, and you can implement sustainability without a written plan.

I have a hard time believing that the city will hire a sustainability coordinator anytime in the near future. Even if the city had the money, there are areas where I would guess the council and the residents would rather see the money spent. So going forward, how does the city incorporate sustainability into its operations?

I would propose working with the existing city commissions and committees, and having a member of the committee, other than the chair (possibly the vice chair), be assigned the sustainability representative. This person would be responsible to ensure sustainability be considered in the decision making process. This person would also work with the committee to determine what measurements are appropriate for them to keep and report on. Once a year, the sustainability members from the various committees would then pull together an annual report on sustainability to present to the council. A big advantage to this approach is it would engage the committees in sustainability, rather than forcing sustainability on them from the outside. Additionally, the various committees and commissions have expertise that the sustainability commission does not.

I have listed below the various city committees and commissions that to me appear to be the most related to the sustainability issues that have been previously identified. Obviously, this isn't a complete listing, but is intended to provide a starting point for discussion:

1. Energy Usage – Utilities Committee, Public Works, Plan Commission

2. Transportation – Public Works, Plan Commission

3. Water – Utilities Committee, Public Works

4. Solid waste – Utilities Committee

5. Land Use – Parks and Recreation, Plan Commission, River and Trails Task Force, Tree Commission, Redevelopment Authority? (don't know if this is considered a permanent commission or only till existing projects are complete).

6. Community: Engagement/Education/Health – Community Affairs / Council Policy, Public Safety, Police and Fire, Housing Authority

Scope

If our reason for being is to make Stoughton a truly sustainable city, then the scope must be larger than just the city government. That does not mean the committee must take on all the responsibility by itself, but such issues need to acknowledge and responsibilities assigned. The example of the flooding issue in Middleton is instructive. It is obviously part of making a sustainable community, but there are experts in the field and the task was left to them. Similarly, in Stoughton, the newly formed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force should be the one to handle that important aspect of sustainability.

From my perspective there are two primary areas of focus that would appear to be most practical. First would be civic involvement. This would involve communicating with the residents what the city has done, finding out what they would like to see done, and most importantly how to get people interested in sustainability.

The second part of the equation is to make use of the information Stoughton Utilities appears to have on energy usage, not just by individual households but by neighborhoods. There are programs in place to encourage moving to more efficient appliances, lighting and a host of other environmentally friendly options, but I'm not sure how well they are known, understood, or used. The program appears to be a scatter shot approach. Those that look for solving energy issues, might find it, but it requires the customer to be interested in the first place, and then to search out possible solutions. I would propose more direct contact with the highest 20% of power and water users, and let them know they are in the highest group of users, and let them know what programs are available to help them reduce their usage and save money. Knowing that your energy/water usage is higher than others in your neighborhood may provide the impetus to look for ways to save.

One theory of management that I've alway liked is that a good manager creates a workplace that no longer needs a manager. Rarely is this possible, but working toward it empowers workers to look for better ways to solve problems with as little management interference as possible. I would like to see sustainability incorporated into the city and community to the point where the Sustainability Committee's responsibility is an annual checkup of where things are and where they are headed, and the rest of the various committees and commissions lead Stoughton into a sustainable future.

John Hallinan

Since I will not be able to attend the April 25th meeting secondary to surgery, I felt it important to make a few points about John's e-mail.

After re-reading the City Council Resolution that created the Sustainability Committee, it is clear that they expect us to review a number of areas in regards to our ecological footprint and create a plan with specific actions. The Council is aware of what the city has done and is doing. The expectation is for us to look for what is missing, what we could do more off or differently for example see John's second point under scope. I see opportunty to make reasonable suggestions under each of the areas we have identified as important. Therefore laying the foundation for a report with specific goals and doable actions. In addition, the City Council will expect that the recommendations from this committee be based on public input. They will use the report to change ordinances or policies. They will focus departments efforts and hopefully be able to fund those efforts. In addition, they may make this committee permanent with funding to carry out public education. The public input to specific actions will add credibility and buy-in to any changes Council may make.

To claim that a report will sit on the shelf does not recognize the fact that we have a Mayor and City Council committed to the issue of sustainability. In my 10 years on council, I found if there is a commitment to the report topic then the CC is more likely to use it as a guide for policy changes and funding allocation.

If the report has specific goals and doable actions the CC will find it easier to impliment. It is the responsibility of the City Council to direct staff and legislate actions. The Mayor as administrator implements, monitors, and reports back to the committees and City Council regarding actions. Having a member of the Sustainability Committee monitor departments is redundant.

John's first point under scope is critical. I think many of the action items in the plan will involve education of the public and increasing commitment to change ones behavior. A report with specific actions supported by a survey will show the level of public support for sustainability and make it easier for Council to direct actions. This committee can recommend that the City Council create a permanent Sustainability Committee with an emphasis on education. Along with volunteers, funding will be essential to have a successful program with meaningful results. Doing the ground work is important to the final results.