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Institutionalizing Sustainability:

An Emerging Trend

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**Forget about the environment.
It will go away.**

**Old-growth forests:
where size really does matter.**

Treehugging dirt worshiper.

More trees—less Bush.

Leave no billionaire behind.

**Ignorance and arrogance
is bad foreign policy.**

When I moved to Eugene six years ago to become Director of the Eugene Public Library I knew that it was a place where environmentalism and sustainability, not to mention freedom of speech, were community values. I could tell by the bumper stickers. I could also tell by the curbside recycling, the ubiquitous recycling bins, and the efforts to meet most LEED standards in the construction of our new downtown library building.

Since then, the City of Eugene has become the major purchaser of the wind power produced by Eugene Water & Electric Board (EWEB). In 2006, Eugene was rated the #1 Green City in the nation by National Geographic's Green Guide²—the only city reviewed that scored over 9 on a 10 point scale. The community has moved to the amazing convenience of commingled curbside recycling.³ Our Lane County Master Recycler program (like those in Linn-Benton, Marion, Klamath Falls, and the Portland Metro region) trains volunteers who contribute thousands of hours to further recycling efforts in our schools, workplaces and communities.⁴ My husband and I own two of the many gas-electric hybrids, sharing Eugene roads with bicyclists and the Emerald Express (EmX) rapid transit buses.⁵ The city recently completed an inventory of community-wide greenhouse gas emissions, which is the first step in developing a comprehensive climate action plan. We are a community that takes “reduce, reuse, recycle” seriously.

“Dick Cheney once scoffed that energy conservation can be a ‘personal virtue’ but is not basis for an energy policy,” according to Nicholas Kristof in his August 20, 2007 *New York Times* column, but “growing evidence suggests he had it exactly wrong.” Kristof laments that “the low-hanging fruit on the energy front is curbing demand—meaning more energy conservation. And it’s appalling that our government isn’t leading us on that.”

While our federal government may be lagging behind other nations in energy policy, state and local governments have begun taking action on sustainability issues. Fueled by growing citizen concern, sustainability is gradually moving from its grassroots origins towards a coordinated policy approach. In other words, it’s becoming institutionalized—and not only in Eugene.

On the state level, Oregon has moved way beyond its first-in-the-nation bottle bill (1971). Major action was taken on sustainability by Oregon’s 71st legislature, which passed the Oregon Sustainability Act.⁶ Governor Kulongoski issued another executive order on sustainability last year.⁷ Resources from the state include the Sustainable Oregon Toolkit, the State of Oregon Sustainability Awards, workshops on such topics as solar energy, and state agency sustainability plans.

Major cities in Oregon have also made strides in sustainability, notably the Portland/Multnomah County Sustainable Development Commission⁸ and the City of Corvallis,⁹ as well as the City of Eugene.



Am I liberal or just well-educated?

Perfect world: if schools had enough money and the military had to hold bake sales.

If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.

In Eugene, both the University of Oregon (UO) and Lane Community College (LCC) have emerged as national leaders in the higher education sustainability scene. In an article from the January 3, 2006 *Register-Guard*, reporter Greg Bolt points out that “perhaps the most robust survivor of the era of environmental activism in the 1960s and ‘70s, recycling has grown and morphed into a much broader range of efforts that now march under the banner of ‘sustainability,’ or the notion that we should meet our needs today in a way that doesn’t harm the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”

According to Marie Matsen, vice president for operations at Lane Community College, “We’re not spending time and money on this just because it feels good. It’s because it really has a tangible impact on us as a college and on the community we serve.”¹⁰ LCC recently became the first community college and only the second college of any type in Oregon to sign the Talloires Declaration, which was created by a group of university leaders, and seeks to “set an example of environmental responsibility by establishing institutional ecology policies and practices of resource conservation, recycling, waste reduction, and environmentally sound operations.”¹¹

In 2005, the UO received national recognition for its recycling program with a Partner of the Year Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, one of many honors for their program.¹² Perhaps

more noticeable for dorm residents is the national RecycleMania competition,¹³ in which students compete annually to see who recycles the most material. The UO has excellent Web resources for sustainability¹⁴ and for environmental policy.¹⁵ The UO Institute for a Sustainable Environment worked closely with the City of Eugene on the Mayor’s Sustainable Business Initiative,¹⁶ the recommendations of which were unveiled at the Mayor’s January 2007 State of the City address.¹⁷

But the complete meaning of sustainability goes beyond recycling, the environment, and even business. “The universal goal of higher education is to create knowledgeable, good citizens of the world that are going to go out and contribute and be members of this community,” according to Karyn Kaplan, recycling program manager at UO. “It’s not just the natural environment or resources; it’s people, too.”

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I don't mind straight people as long as they act gay in public.

A person's a person, no matter how small.
—HORTON THE ELEPHANT

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One of the first formal attempts to address the broadening concept of sustainability was by a United Nations commission convened in 1983. The U.N. General Assembly's recognition of the global nature of environmental problems and concern "about the accelerating deterioration of the human environment and natural resources and the consequences of that deterioration for economic and social development" led to frequently cited definition and policy recommendations.¹⁸ A great resource for current policy and projects at the international level is the U.N.'s Commission on Sustainable Development.¹⁹

During Mayor Kitty Piercy's campaign for office in 2004, her economic platform was the "triple bottom line"—that both business and government must pay attention to the economic, environmental, and social effects of policy choices in order to thrive not just in the next quarter, but in the next generation.²⁰

These initiatives and new programs build on a solid base, including a Green Team initiated by concerned city staffers. In fact, according to Lynne Eichner-Kelley, Sustainable Operations Analyst for the City of Eugene, the city has a legacy of sustainability work dating back to the 1980s. More detail about some of those efforts can be found on the city's Web site.²¹ Recent actions related to the Sustainability Initiative include, the City Council's resolutions on "a sustainable buildings policy for buildings owned and occupied by the City" and "publicly committing the City of Eugene to sustainable practices and to businesses that produce sustainable products and services."

Under Mayor Piercy's leadership, Eugene's long history of working towards public social responsibility has broadened to actively partner with the business community. Two lo-

cal business leaders, Rusty Rexius and David Funk, were tapped by the Mayor to co-chair her Sustainable Business Initiative (SBI). The Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce developed the Emerald Awards program "to honor businesses in the Eugene and Springfield area that contribute to our community's vitality and quality of life by implementing sustainable business practices" and demonstrating "the important connection between the success of local businesses and the quality of life in Eugene/Springfield."²²

In February 2007, the Eugene City Council added "Sustainability" as one of its ten major initiatives (others address issues such as "Race," "Homelessness," and "Arts and the Outdoors").²³ A cross-departmental team was established to craft the city's Sustainability Initiative Action Plan, which I was asked to chair, with the following charge: "Develop Office of Sustainability and Sustainability Commission that supports broad sustainable practices and create a tool chest of things needed to support businesses that produce sustainable products or provides or utilizes sustainable practices." Since then, the city has established an Office of Sustainability, hired a manager, Felicity Fahy, and is currently interviewing applicants for the Sustainability Commission.

If you can read this you might enjoy the library.

And how does Eugene Public Library (EPL) fit into the picture?

From the broader organizational perspective, the Library is one of the divisions of the City. As such, it participates in and contributes to all the citywide initiatives and programs. For example, EPL's new energy-efficient Downtown Library won an EWEB Energy Edge Award.²⁴ Now, after nearly five years of occupancy, the city has embarked on a building "recommissioning" process for the



lighting and HVAC systems. In recommissioning, these systems are analyzed and reprogrammed for improved efficiencies based on several years of building occupancy data.

The city supports alternative transportation, including providing Lane Transit District bus passes to all employees, which is supported by an Emergency Ride Home system. A high number of library employees regularly bike, bus, walk, or carpool to work. The city also administers Transportation Reimbursement Accounts (TRA) that allow for use of pre-tax dollars to pay for certain dependent care, health care, and transportation expenses that employees would normally pay for with after-tax dollars. And when EPL staff attends meetings and conferences, we carpool in a city-owned Prius.


Recently a citywide analysis of paper use led to policies about using recycled paper, reducing the number of printers, and an organizational standard of duplex printing. The library is next for another analysis going on citywide—a solid waste content audit (AKA “dumpster dives”)—to estimate how much solid waste we, as an organization, are producing, and what it’s composed of as the first step in expanding our internal recycling program.

Over the past five years, EPL’s extensive investment in its virtual and digital resources has in part been for social equity and sustainability reasons. In addition to reducing paper and solid waste, this expands availability of information to a broader audience, reduces dependence on the transportation system to access reliable information, and extends resources within our buildings across the digital divide. Our recently installed Internet/print management system has significantly reduced paper and printer cartridge use, as well as equitably assigning Internet resources while freeing staff from manually managing the queue. Maureen Cole describes another EPL effort, expanding recycling beyond the basics, in another

article in this *Quarterly* issue.

EPL’s system of ensuring a safe and welcoming environment for all, based on consistent and equitable compliance with our “Patron Code of Conduct,” is based entirely on expectations around patron behavior. By focusing the handling of incidents strictly on behavior we can be sure that we are not succumbing to unconscious bias in how we encourage the use of the public resource by the entire community, regardless of class, creed, color, age, gender or any other factor.

EPL, along with the entire Library, Recreation, and Cultural Services Department (LRCS), is taking the lead on the social equity part of sustainability for the City of Eugene. The LRCS Mission Statement speaks directly to this: “The Library, Recreation and Cultural Services Department’s mission is to enrich the lives of Eugene citizens through diverse opportunities where discovery, creativity, personal and community growth can flourish; where people can experience the open exchange of ideas; where individuals, families and neighborhoods can feel connected to their community; and where all citizens have full and equitable access to lifelong learning, recreational and cultural experiences.”

“Eugene has worked for years—and continues to work hard—on environmental stewardship because we know it is the right thing to do for the future, and because it is a strongly held value in our community,” says Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy. 

You Can't Not Think.

Think Globally, Act Locally.

**I Change Myself,
I Change The World.**

Footnotes

¹A note about the bumper sticker quotations—all are actual bumper stickers seen in Eugene.

²Eugene rated the #1 Green City by Green Guide: <http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/113/top10cities>.

³An example is Sanipac's commingled curbside recycling program: <http://www.sanipac.com/residential/residential-recycling/>.

⁴Oregon Master Recycler Program: <http://www.masterrecycler.org/becoming-master-recycler.php>.

⁵Lane Transit District's EmX rapid transit buses: <http://www.ltd.org/search/showresult.html?versionthread=d38519362672c662c61a9300c1dd78be>.

⁶Oregon Sustainability Act: http://www.sustainableoregon.net/sust_act/HB3948.cfm.

⁷Governor Kulongoski's executive order on sustainability: governor.oregon.gov/Gov/pdf/eo0602.pdf.

⁸Portland/Multnomah County sustainability program: <http://www.portlandonline.com/osd>.

⁹City of Corvallis sustainability program: http://www.ci.corvallis.or.us/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1825&Itemid=2099.

¹⁰Lane Community College's sustainability program: <http://www.lanecol.edu/sustainability/>.

¹¹The Talloires Declaration: <http://www.tufts.edu/talloiresnetwork/downloads/TalloiresDeclaration2005.pdf>.

¹²University of Oregon program awards: http://www.uoregon.edu/~recycle/about_us_awards_text.htm.

¹³RecycleMania competition: <http://www.recyclemaniacs.org>.

¹⁴University of Oregon's sustainability program: darkwing.uoregon.edu/~recycle/site_map.htm.

¹⁵University of Oregon's environmental policies: <http://www.uoregon.edu/~eic/>.

¹⁶University of Oregon's Institute for a Sustainable Environment and Eugene Mayor's Sustainable Business Initiative: <http://www.uoregon.edu/~cwch/programs/SBJD/SBI.html>.

¹⁷Mayor Piercy's 2007 State of the City Address: <http://www.eugene-or.gov/>, select City Hall> Mayor and Council> Link to Reports and Documents> 2007 State of the City Speech.

¹⁸See Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/42/ares42-187.htm>.

¹⁹U.N.'s Commission on Sustainable Development: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/index.html>.

²⁰Mayor Piercy talks about the triple bottom line: <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Seeking+sustainability-a0136860729>.

²¹City of Eugene's sustainability program: <http://www.eugene-or.gov/sustainability>.

²²Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce's Emerald Awards: <http://www.eugenechamber.com/emerald.htm>.

²³Eugene City Council Goals: <http://www.eugene-or.gov/citycouncil>, select City Council Goals.

²⁴Eugene Public Library's Energy Edge Award: <http://www.eweb.org/business/energy/energysmart/ebd/0311/library.htm>.

