

GOALS FOR

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Environmental Commission of the City of Kent

Adopted by Council on April 21, 1999

To advance the public policy goal of creating and maintaining a sustainable environment in the City of Kent, the Environmental Commission presents the following goals as a guide to developing future public policies in several areas and to evaluating the success of those policies as time passes. If the city is to move toward sustainable development, then sensitivity to those concepts should become a part of the daily decision making process, a part of the way in which public officials at all levels approach their work.

How to monitor success is an important part of this document. We list goals, strategies for attaining them and indicators to evaluate progress. We suggest that an annual “sustainability assessment” be incorporated into the City’s planning processes, to establish benchmarks and the degree to which goals are achieved.

We recognize that Kent is a geographically small community that is heavily influenced by events outside its borders. It is part of the Cleveland/Akron metropolitan region and is affected by all that affects the larger community. Achieving these goals, then, will depend in part on how external events impact the city. Yet where choices can be made, where the city has at least partial control of its destiny, its decisions should be guided by reference to whether or not particular choices will advance or retard sustainability.

These goals themselves should not be set in stone. They should be reviewed periodically, both to measure the extent to which they have been attained, and to modify them to reflect changing societal circumstances.

A sustainable development plan requires the balance of four different areas – the Economy, the Environment, Planning & Resources, and Society & Culture. Perhaps most important is a healthy economy, as without that necessary piece, progress toward other goals will likely be difficult.

The four goal areas are presented alphabetically. Within each area the individual goals are unnumbered, to reflect that they are not listed in priority order.

THE ECONOMY

No community can sustain itself unless it is able to provide employment and income for its residents, and generate tax revenues sufficient to provide an appropriate level of public services. It should also develop in ways that maintain the value of the existing built environment and preserve those aspects of the community valued by residents. It is important that new development complement existing community resources, and that it provide benefits that exceed its costs. It is important that Kent have a continuously evolving definition of sustainable economic development, and that its public policies encourage desirable development and discourage that which is not desirable.

GOAL#1: Support and sustain a viable central business district (CBD).

ACTION PLAN: Develop incentives that encourage continued investment in the Central Business District (CBD). Review zoning and building regulations to make changes beneficial to the CBD.

INDICATORS: Inventory the number of building renovations, new constructions, the occupancy of buildings, and the access to businesses in the CBD; review zoning and building regulations to make changes beneficial to the CBD.

GOAL#2: Support and sustain office, retail and industrial nodes outside of the CBD.

ACTION PLAN: Identify appropriate locations, provide zoning, planning and infrastructure; develop incentives that will encourage desired forms of development; review zoning and building regulations and make changes that will accommodate business without negatively affecting nearby non-commercial uses.

INDICATORS: Inventory the number of building renovations, new constructions, occupancy of buildings, and the access to business outside the CBD.

GOAL#3: Protect and utilize the historical character of the City.

ACTION PLAN: Identify significant historic structures and districts and have them officially recognized as such; encourage adaptive reuses that will not compromise their historic value; review and revise building and zoning codes to assure protection of historic sites.

INDICATORS: Monitor the condition and uses of historic sites, districts and buildings.

GOAL #4: Develop Kent as a high technology research and manufacturing area.

ACTION PLAN: Define “high technology” in ways appropriate to this community; create and implement a program to encourage high technology research and manufacturing in cooperation with KSU and other organizations.

INDICATORS: Number of new and existing companies located in Kent and the number employed in high technology industries.

GOAL#5: Support and sustain existing local businesses.

ACTION PLAN: Create a business retention program that may include economic incentives for redevelopment and expansion; encourage local ownership; support the manufacture and sale of local goods and provide other assistance as needed.

INDICATORS: Inventory businesses annually, determine current ownership, and assess expansion or contraction in cooperation with other public and private entities.

GOAL#6: Encourage economic growth, development and redevelopment in the community that sustains or improves upon the quality of life; encourage mutually beneficial cooperative endeavors with other political subdivisions.

ACTION PLAN: Assess new and existing businesses for impact on the quality of life; encourage and retain businesses that either produce recycled/reusable products or are considered to be less-polluting and more environmentally-friendly; resolve conflicts between residents and businesses as appropriate.

INDICATORS: Number of businesses that meet minimum criteria (to be established) of sustaining or improving the quality of life.

GOAL#7: Utilize tax abatement judiciously, to attract businesses with “high quality” jobs that are

likely to remain in the area and contribute to economic health after abatement expires.

ACTION PLAN: Review tax abatement policy and performance standards to include a measurement of community reinvestment (jobs, wages, and income tax generation), a standard to measure the quality of jobs created, retention after the tax-abated period and a formula to ensure that new businesses do not have an unfair advantage over existing businesses.

INDICATORS: Success or failure of tax-abated companies in meeting performance standards; monitor impact of tax-abatement on fiscal health of school system.

GOAL #8: Sustain an adequate and fair standard of living for all citizens.

ACTION PLAN: Encourage alternative economic strategies, which allow the unemployed and underemployed to contribute their talents and services to the community; Support programs that improve the skills and work attitude of the labor force; Ensure accessibility to employment for all.

INDICATORS: Unemployment rate and the proportion of jobs above the poverty level; create a plan for high quality job creation/retention.

THE ENVIRONMENT

All life is part of and dependent upon our physical environment. As modern industrial culture has created a wealth of goods that enhance our lives, how we manufacture, use, and dispose of those products has become of critical importance. As a community, we will have opportunities to make choices that will determine the extent to which processes used will minimize ecological disturbance and maximize the likelihood that the industrial culture that has served us well will survive into the indefinite future. The goals that follow are based on the assumption that conservation is an appropriate and conservative approach.

GOAL #9: Establish and continue to promote and expand programs designed to reduce, reuse and/or recycle waste materials and to dispose of hazardous wastes properly.

ACTION PLAN: Increase the amount of waste diverted from landfill disposal through recycling and composting; create and maintain proper hazardous waste disposal facilities;

educate the public regarding alternatives to household and industrial products, as they are available, that result in hazardous waste creation.

INDICATORS: Quantity of waste diverted from a landfill as a percentage of total waste generated; Quantity of hazardous waste collected that are reused and/or disposed of properly.

GOAL #10: Encourage increased consumption of products made from recycled materials.

ACTION PLAN: Encourage additional purchase and use of recycled products by the City; encourage residents, businesses and other public agencies to purchase products made from recycled materials.

INDICATORS: Proportional increase/decrease in substitution of recycled products for traditional products.

GOAL #11: Improve and sustain the quality of the Cuyahoga River.

ACTION PLAN: Improve urban infrastructure to reduce inflow of pollutants; take necessary steps to assure continuous and adequate water flow through Kent and downstream communities; continue to resist attempts to reduce river flow in ways that would degrade the river.

INDICATORS: The degree to which the City meets EPA quality standards. Monitor water ecosystem and flow.

GOAL #12: Protect presently used and potentially useable aquifers and other water sources from degradation.

ACTION PLAN: Identify and protect water sources; rehabilitate and mitigate the polluting affects of landfills and other problem sites that endanger water resources; monitor water consumption vs. availability and encourage water conservation and water reuse through education.

INDICATORS: Number of productive and potentially productive water-source sites under wellhead protection and free of potential contamination.

GOAL #13: Promote the use of less-polluting methods of transportation.

ACTION PLAN: Implement 1993 Intermodal Transportation Plan; encourage ridership on available public transportation; increase number of street miles served by public transportation and bike paths, and increase number of sidewalks safe for travel.

INDICATORS: Number of people using public transit; miles of bike paths and bike lanes; percentage of streets served by safe sidewalks.

GOAL #14: Encourage energy conservation.

ACTION PLAN: Promote lower consumption through use of alternative/ renewable energy sources and energy conservation; keep building code up to date; educate public in energy conservation.

INDICATORS: Total energy consumption in the city; evaluate success of educational efforts.

GOAL #15: Promote aesthetic integration of developed areas with the surrounding natural landscape; enhancement of the City's public spaces, parks and recreation facilities, river banks & streams and natural areas; improved accessibility for all citizens.

ACTION PLAN: Preserve and increase total acres of natural public land, gardens and parks; improve access and use of public parks and recreational facilities; increase the number of private and street trees; improve landscaping.

INDICATORS: Assess the adequacy of parks, recreational facilities, and shade trees by applying appropriate professional standards.

PLANNING ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

All communities are planned. What differs is who does the planning and what consequences result from the process used. Cities may take control of their future development, coordinating a number of processes to assure that the whole is at least equal to the sum of the parts. An alternative is to rely on the actions of individual land owners, each pursuing a particular set of interests, and developing their properties without

coordination, with over-all land-use patterns constituting the sum total of those decisions. It is the Commission's contention that communities in which individual parts are integrated to the extent possible will sustain themselves more fully than those created by hit-and-miss processes.

GOAL #16: Control and limit residential and commercial sprawl and encourage compact development patterns.

ACTION PLAN: Review and recommend zoning, planning and subdivision regulations to encourage cluster-type development and discourage sprawl; assure that all development furthers the objectives of existing planning goals as articulated in such documents as the zoning code, comprehensive development plan and transportation plan; apply general standards in zoning code [sections 1113.05 (a) (1)-(5) of Ordinance 1985-26] to assure harmonious development.

INDICATORS: The extent to which approved projects meet or fail to meet the city's planning goals and objectives, and the number of projects that require variances from city codes.

GOAL #17: Advocate and encourage the redevelopment of aging structures and neighborhoods.

ACTION PLAN: Encourage redevelopment through incentive programs and enforcement of the External Maintenance Code.

INDICATORS: Inventory of aged and/or dilapidated structures and neighborhoods; number of citations issued and number of buildings improved.

GOAL #18: Develop a balanced mix of decent, affordable and energy-efficient housing, including off-campus student housing.

ACTION PLAN: Establish targets and utilize zoning to produce appropriate mix of housing; review and improve enforcement of regulations regarding housing, noise and other nuisances, fire, zoning, and building codes.

INDICATORS: Evaluate housing mix to ascertain degree to which mix approaches targets.

GOAL #19: Discourage inappropriate development of farmlands, woodlands, and critical natural areas.

ACTION PLAN: Develop and plan for green spaces and linear greenways, riparian systems (river and stream banks), canals, wetlands, rail/trails, and scenic roadways and integrate with regional plans and construction; implement a Green Corridor plan

INDICATORS: Acreage in each category and progress toward planning goals.

SOCIETY & CULTURE

The most important element in a city is its people. A sustainable community is also a stable community. It must have at its core a society of productive individuals and families who are able to live in dignity. Hence the employment available, insofar as it can be influenced by public policy, should pay whatever society at a given time considers "a living wage." Those who cannot provide for themselves must be provided for at a level consistent with human health and dignity. Communities that work toward social stability as part of environmental sustainability ought to reduce the extent of social dislocation and diminish the costs of dislocation.

GOAL #20: Increase citizen awareness of public laws and policies and encourage citizen participation.

ACTION PLAN: Promote community membership in local organizations, volunteerism, voting and other civic duties.

INDICATORS: Proportion of citizens participating in volunteer organizations, city boards and commissions and other civic duties; voter registration and voter turnout.

GOAL #21: Increase neighborhood interaction, develop the "sense" of neighborhood and improve community relationships.

ACTION PLAN: Encourage neighborhood activities and organizations.

INDICATORS: Number and success of active neighborhood groups.

GOAL #22: Reduce discrimination, harassment or assaults based upon racial, ethnic or other attributes typically associated with biased behavior.

ACTION PLAN: Encourage policies, behaviors and attitudes that reduce discriminatory practices and foster leadership that is representative of the diversity in the community.

INDICATORS: Number of incidents and/or complaints.

GOAL #23: Enhance physical safety and a sense of a secure community for all members and encourage the prevention of violence.

ACTION PLAN: Decrease the number of pedestrian/vehicle accidents and other accidents, juvenile crimes, domestic violence incidents, hate crimes, property crimes and other acts of violence through education and the monitoring of environmental factors such as traffic patterns, pedestrian access and safety, reduction of societal pressures that lead to stress and violence, etc.

INDICATORS: Number of reported crimes (by category); number of crimes per capita as compared to similar cities.

GOAL #24: Encourage community-based life-long learning for an enhanced quality of life.

ACTION PLAN: Increase the number of and participation in courses offered to the public through higher education, the Kent Schools, Kent Free Library and the Parks and Recreation Department for continued learning.

INDICATORS: Number of programs, courses and participants.

GOAL #25: Increase and maintain community resources, which support basic human needs while encouraging self-sufficiency.

ACTION PLAN: Maintain and support social services and agencies through public and private funding.

INDICATORS:

Monitor degree of need and the ability of public and private agencies to meet that need; monitor number of clients served by public and private agencies, as well as their funding level and funding sources.

SUMMARY

Creating sustainable communities involves the active, informed participation of the local government and other institutions and of individual citizens. It requires forethought and intelligent planning for our collective future. The goals enunciated here, if seriously pursued, should result in a richer community, and one that is more stable, than if sustainable development is ignored. Working to improve our economy, environment, planning resources, and society and culture in harmony with concepts of sustainability should result in a more effective deployment of public resources in the years ahead, and in the creation of a more stable, productive society. Attention to sustainable development now should result in fewer future dislocations and the heavy costs correcting those dislocations will demand; sustainable development in the present is an investment in the long-term health and welfare of our society.