



## Will Planners Use the “Sustaining Places” Moniker?

Thank you Daniel for a surprisingly engaging question (go to this [APA SCP Linked In discussion](#) for more detail and others’ responses). With only nine voices contributing, we already have quite an interesting variety of perspectives. I have to say that I cannot really get used to “sustaining places,” even after reviewing and commenting on two drafts of the Task Force Report.

Sustainability, sustainable development and their variations are relatively new, imprecisely defined terms that people either love or hate, but which are imprecisely understood at best. One always needs to examine the use of the term to grasp it’s meaning in any instance. Many would argue they are over used, and i would have a tendency to agree. However, when i try to find a better word, i arrive back at sustainability for a variety of reasons.

The scientist in me likes regenerative, because that is in fact what sustainability is all about. Sustainable or sustainability is a counterpoint to the increasingly obvious unsustainable, false-positive prosperity pipe dream of the business-as-usual scenario. The current mess as Storm so accurately describes is what we get with an economy that systematically undermines the regenerative bio-geo-chemical process of the biosphere’s life-support/regeneration system. Alignment of the human economy with the regenerative ecological, economic, and design principles of the biosphere—a restorative, or better, net positive approach—holds the potential for durable and equitable economic, community, and societal prosperity. I believe it is truly the last frontier and only/last basis for a long wave of regenerative/ sustainable economic and societal development.

The definition Daniel provided above is a definition of “planning” for sustaining places or sustaining places planning; but what is a “sustaining place?” A place that sustains, but what is sustained? A few other places in the Task Force Report indicate that it is a place where the ecological and socioeconomic systems are not in conflict, although they use a more precise phrase. After reading that during my report review, the concept of sustaining places made more sense. It even became comprehensible. The phrase is not used to mean sustaining as replicating in perpetuity the current mess It refers to an imprecisely defined balance between human and environmental systems such that the environmental systems are not fundamentally degraded or fatally compromised. That is a good start, but I believe it really needs to be developed more precisely to provide the benchmark at which planners need to aim clearly.

Having personally arrived at a better understanding of the phrase, I do not think that sustaining places will catch on as the new moniker that Bruce intends, either among planners or in the general population, except to refer to the APA Sustaining Places Initiative (SPI) and related actions and material. One’s first impression, or at least mine, upon reading or hearing it, is a big blank; what is that (sustaining places); what does it mean? That thought is followed by a frustration at not finding any quick conceptual links in my brain to anything concrete other than some guessing. And even having been involved with the



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reviewing the report, following the SPI for the past 1.5 years, and being sympathetic, even empathetic, I still have that same experience whenever I see the phrase, albeit at a lower level than I did initially. Instead, I think people will tend to use some variation of the already familiar and popular sustainable, sustainability, or sustainable development, as in sustainable community planning or community sustainability planning, sustainability planning, or sustainable places planning or planning for sustainable places. Having said that, I think the moniker can/will work for APA’s initiative as it is very distinctive and serves to call attention to sustainability planning for places, the APA’s distinctive issue, arena, and contribution.

Personally, I would use the phrase Sustainable Places Planning (Initiative) because I think it sounds better and flows better. However, at the level of a few-word moniker, I am not so fussy. Whichever few words or phrase one ultimately uses, its meaning will always be vague, imprecise, and indicative until it becomes deeply rooted in our social experience and knowledge, and then it will not matter which phrase we use!

As a result, we’ll all be explaining whichever term we use in every instance of use so that people understand the sustainability planning challenge: understanding the dynamic, whole-systems relationship between the environment as the primary life support system and economy of the planet and the embedded and totally dependent societal and human economy subsystems in such a way as to illuminate the innovation path for business and communities to durable, secure, and just economic, community, and global prosperity for a stabilized population of 9 billion by 2050 in just 40 short years and for a catastrophic climate change mitigation plan so that average global warming will not exceed 1 degree C and CO<sub>2</sub> and GHGs are eventually reversed and stabilized at pre-industrial levels.

That is our sustainability planning challenge, whatever we call it. By this definition then, first-phase sustaining places planning (2010-2050) in every place on the planet requires something resembling the following key steps:

- (1) Eliminating and reversing CO<sub>2</sub> and GHG production in line with the not-to-exceed-1-degree-centigrade global warming scenario and to the point where CO<sub>2</sub>/GHG production becomes negative ASAP;
- (2) Doing so in a way that restores natural systems and produces greater real wealth and prosperity more equitably distributed than the societal-suicide scenario of business as usual (understanding the system change challenges and the policy changes and innovation path required to get there);
- (3) Integrative land-use/sustainable development planning for the place’s share of the 9B global population by 2050;
- (4) Planning for the local/regional growth variation in a new sustainable economy with a



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global population stabilized at 9B in 2050 (some places economies and population will grow/some will decline even though the total population is stabilized at 9B);

(5) Integrative land-use/sustainability planning for a sustainable economy/place by 2050.

(6) Planning NOW (hardening the economic and built urban/regional infrastructure and system) for the highly likely set of devastating destruction anticipated during the climate change adaptation that has already begun and will last over the next 200 years under the 1C-degree soft landing climate change mitigation scenario;

(7) Same as point No. 5, but for the additional set of devastating destruction anticipated under a 2 degree average warming scenario under the probability that we miss the 1 degree scenario (planning for the devastation under any scenario higher than 2 degrees is probably not rationally supported).

These tasks, steps, challenges, go far beyond the traditional role of planning, but not beyond the theoretical domain or ultimate contribution of planning. The local comprehensive plan, as Bruce so aptly points out, is the place to start. But effectively addressing the challenges of producing sustaining places and a sustaining planet in the comp plan will take planning and planners far beyond the traditional realm into leading multi-stakeholder sustainability business planning in their business communities, to multi-stakeholder sustainability planning that includes the place’s supply chains and industries. It will require highly effective and innovative cross- and multi- jurisdictional governmental policy and legislative initiatives to neutralize existing regulations that generate unsustainability now and to create the new regulations that will drive the transition to the new prosperity and opportunities of a sustainable/regenerative economy.

History is clear, we cannot leave these tasks to the politicians or the business community, but we cannot accomplish the tasks alone. It is either a collaborative win for all or a loss for all. In this regards, the reconceptualization of the comp plan as a key vehicle and driver for democratic local sustainability planning that understands/pursues the systems linkages required to drive the needed sustainability transformation in the few short years we have left to lay the foundation is right on target.