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## Plan-it sustainably

By Scott T. Edmondson, AICP, and Katja Irvin, AICP

### Northern Section-SFSU client project: Leveraging the leading edge of sustainability

Sustainability planning is everywhere these days; but where is the leading edge of sustainable community planning and how can we leverage it to enhance our own initiatives? This core question captured the imagination of three graduating seniors in SFSU's Urban Studies and Planning Program.

The *Sustainability Committee/SFSU student collaboration* launched the Committee's research program. Exploring leading edge sustainability planning cases and assembling an initial set of useful resources was the objective. As Albert Einstein said, "Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means." However, which examples are worth emulating?

Scott pitched the initial concept to the class, and the project developed in three phases.

- (1) A week of self-training in strategic sustainability planning frameworks;
- (2) a survey and assessment of international "benchmark" cases; and
- (3) an exploration and profile of Northern Section cases. These phases illuminate the state of sustainability planning and provide leading edge examples to explore and model.

The final SFSU report includes three overarching recommendations. Although one agency, initiative, or jurisdiction cannot implement them alone, they provide insight that can stimulate innovation in our own initiatives. The team concluded that, "beyond the fundamental need for every plan to be developed using a strategic framework" and using science-based sustainability success principles, three other characteristics contributed to success.

**First—plan in context, not in isolation:** Effective sustainability planning cannot exist on a city-by-city basis, but must be addressed holistically, in a closed loop, cradle-to-cradle approach to urban metabolism—as an "organic whole" says Timothy Beatley in *Green Urbanism*. That implies a new system of metropolitan planning and governance capable of a fresh approach to urban, suburban, rural, and natural systems issues alike. In 1991, New Zealand reorganized its governance and planning along bioregional watershed boundaries with great success. <http://bit.ly/njN18Q>

**Implication:** View jurisdictional environmental quality and economic prosperity as the product of interrelationship with the larger region, not simply the product of isolated, jurisdiction-specific factors. Plan and make decisions accordingly, leveraging the supporting regional interrelationships. Transform the concept of "home" in "home rule" from isolated to interrelated.

**Second—collaborate:** "The most successful plans ... are the result of a collaborative [multi-stakeholder] effort. ... There is a creativity and attention to multiple factors that result from these interdisciplinary processes," writes Beatley.

*(continued on next page)*

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## Plan-it Sustainably *(continued from previous page)*

**Implication:** Instead of pursuing individual projects and/or regulatory compliance, launch ongoing, multi-stakeholder, community sustainability planning initiatives to drive the ongoing socio-economic/environmental innovation required for success.

**Third—cultivate educational dialogue:** “We must begin extensive, far reaching campaigns to educate the public about sustainability, why a shift is necessary, and what they can do to help.”

**Implication:** Sustainability is fundamentally about multi-stakeholder education and dialogue, ultimately connected to planning, the sum of which will correct our course from the unsustainability of business as usual to sustainable communities. Begin the dialogue now, ahead of sustainability planning initiatives, and continue them during planning and implementation.

With many thanks to the SFSU team for their excellent work, we begin the Sustainability Committee's research program. We invite you to comment on this article, <http://bit.ly/nSwicU>; review the project report and resources (<http://bit.ly/oTwEme>) including the pitch to the class, presentation to the board, and report; and comment and discuss as motivated.

### Committee update

Check out the Committee's temporary web home, <http://bit.ly/oOgi1W> and use the resources, comment, and send feedback at <http://bit.ly/ne9ss0>. Join the Committee's email list for alerts, news, updates, and resources.

### Upcoming event

July 28 North Bay RAC “Brown Bag” at Sonoma Mountain Village—a walking tour of a model sustainable redevelopment project (see [page 25](#)).

### Recommended resources

**Something from the “other” coast – Sustainable Jersey.**™ A certification program for municipalities that want to go green, save money, and take steps to sustain their quality of life over the long term (<http://bit.ly/pAVB2>). See also, Office of Planning and Sustainable Communities, <http://bit.ly/pILKX9>

**Something in our region – Sustainable San Mateo County.** Fifteenth annual edition of Indicators for a Sustainable San Mateo County, <http://bit.ly/p1ovW6>

### Training invitation—Strategic Sustainability Planning

Those interested can join a one hour, free webinar (8/9, 9/22, or 12/6; **CM | 1.0**) or an award winning, introductory web-based course at a reduced promotional cost of \$55, including a bonus one hour conference call discussion session (CM credit being explored). We can do it if 10 or more sign up before July 30. Details at <http://bit.ly/ofTYwr> ■