





Strategy for a Sustainable Sterling Heights

EARTH DAY

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Richard J. Notte, Mayor
Deanna Koski, Mayor Pro Tem
Richard L. Bracci
Yvonne D. Kniaz
Joseph V. Romano
Maria G. Schmidt
Barbara A. Ziarko

Mark D. Vanderpool
City Manager

Michael G. Bartholomew, MCP
City Development Director/ Assistant City Manager

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to present a comprehensive strategy that will, over the next three to five years and beyond, make Sterling Heights more sustainable and environmentally sensitive. While this strategy primarily targets City activities and actions, we intend to promote and encourage similar actions by individual businesses and residents. Together, we can make a huge difference that will assure Sterling Heights' residents enjoy a community that is environmentally sustainable and continue to have a high quality of life well into the future.

Sterling Heights' Environmentally Sustainable Vision

Sterling Heights is a leader in environmentally sustainable development that protects and enhances our community's quality of life, and will continue to do so for future generations. Sterling Heights' residents and the business community foster and apply sound environmental practices. High technology, energy conservation and recycling are employed appropriately at every opportunity.

Background

A combination of forces, including population growth, economic expansion, and ever-higher energy prices, particularly for fossil fuels, are stressing the earth's resources and society's economic ability to maintain our current standard of living. Further, it has become increasingly clear that many of these challenges are falling to local government to solve. Local governments that act with innovation, creativity, foresight and successfully address these challenges, will likely enjoy economic advantages and lead the way for others to follow.

Over the past year City Council members have expressed interest in committing to make the City of Sterling Heights a leader in environmental stewardship and sustainability. Staff has been working to fulfill this ambitious vision for the City. As a first step, the Sterling Heights Green Team will be formed with broad representation from City departments. The Team will identify a few key areas to focus their attention for 2008 including: Current Green Practices, Green Facilities and Construction, Green Measures and Benchmarking, and Green Policies. While the City has always been mindful of green strategies, City staff, residents and businesses make thousands of small decisions each day that relate to the overall sustainability of the City. Consequently, no single department or division can achieve the vision alone. Rather, the vision requires a coordinated and strategic examination of current practices and procedures across the City. Sterling Heights has already made substantial progress toward achieving this vision. To a large extent, the City's programs and activities to date have already resulted in major progress toward transforming Sterling Heights into an environmentally sensitive and sustainable community. However, much more can be done and the City wishes to be a leader. The City recognizes that to succeed, the approach must be comprehensive and coordinated across the City's own activities and behaviors, and in time must reach out to individual homes and businesses.





What is a Sustainable Sterling Heights?

At the outset, Sterling Heights acknowledges that we are a part of a greater community comprised of cities, citizens and corporations and that our actions interrelate with, and to a large degree, depend on the rest of the region. Sterling Heights cannot accomplish sustainability alone and in a vacuum. We will need to partner with other public, private, and not-for-profit community members and work together. Sterling Heights wishes to identify those elements over which it has either direct control or significant influence and move them in a sustainable direction.

So what does a sustainable Sterling Heights look like? The dictionary defines *sustainable* as “capable of being maintained or remaining in existence; and to supply with necessities or nourishment.” The term “sustainable communities” is an outgrowth of the natural resources conservation movement where water, air, soil and wildlife resources were used, harvested and managed for multiple and sometimes competing purposes (food, fiber, recreation, aesthetics) at a rate that could be naturally replenished and “sustained” over many generations. This contrasts with some farming and business practices around the globe that are using resources at a faster pace than the planet can naturally replenish the resource.

Therefore, being “sustainable” means the City is achieving economic prosperity while protecting the planet’s natural systems while meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainability becomes a way of organizing and managing a City to create a healthy environment, vigorous economy, and vibrant community. Sustainability encourages both public and private organizations to be better stewards of the environment, and in turn glean positive economic benefits for residents. In other words, pursuing sustainability will stimulate technological innovation, advance Sterling Heights’ attractiveness and competitiveness, and improve our overall quality of life.





Why do We Want to be Sustainable?

As a sustainable community, Sterling Heights' residents will enjoy a variety of benefits including:

- The City will continue to enjoy an adequate supply of clean drinking water available to residents at a reasonable price.
- Residents and businesses pay no more for energy than necessary. This will become increasingly important as the price of heating, cooling, electricity and fuel continues to climb during the next decade.
- New investments in technology and process efficiencies create more jobs and sales revenues for area green merchants.
- A variety of transit options ease resident commuter congestion.
- Solid waste disposal is reasonable and affordable for residents.
- Recycled products and materials are less expensive as the volume of recycled materials rises.
- Pollutants are reduced in the air and water.
- The City's potential regulatory liability for environmental violations will be reduced.
- More trees and vegetation will make the City more attractive to residents and visitors and will have a cooling effect on the City and reduce stormwater runoff.
- Public health threats from vermin, bacteria and toxic pollutants are reduced.
- Sterling Heights flood risk is reduced through routine maintenance and enhancement of the City's storm water management systems. Wherever possible, stormwater is redirected to pervious areas that allow percolation to the water table.
- Sterling Heights enjoys an enhanced reputation and notoriety as a sustainability leader.





Goals for Environmental Stewardship and a Sustainable Sterling Heights

For Sterling Heights to realize its vision, the City must identify a set of attainable measurable goals or targets and an action plan to follow that ensures steady progress towards meeting such sustainability goals. To succeed, the approach must be comprehensive and coordinated across the City’s own activities and behaviors, and eventually reach out to individual homes and businesses. As noted above, each incremental decision from designing new or renovated buildings to purchasing copy paper, or buying fuel for City vehicles should be viewed through a “sustainability lens” or guiding principles before committing resources to a particular course of action. Of course, sustainability considerations do not trump all other important City goals or interests, but sustainability should be viewed in conjunction with, or as equally important as, other factors.

Sterling Heights’ Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability Goals are summarized in the following table:

TOPIC	GOAL
Air	Maintain clean, healthy air and contribute to regional air pollution solutions.
Ecosystems	Protect and restore ecosystems and their functions.
Energy	Maximize energy efficiency and purchase renewable sources of energy. Generate energy as opportunities present themselves.
Land	Maintain and enhance open space as we continue to develop, redevelop and grow the community. Support ecologically-sensitive land use and management practices.
Materials	Use and reuse raw and purchased materials carefully and responsively. Shift to environmentally friendly (biodegradable or recyclable) materials wherever economically feasible.
Water Supply	Ensure availability of adequate water supplies for all desired uses, including fire suppression, commercial uses and landscape irrigation needs.
Water Quality	Restore and maintain high-quality water resources in the City’s watersheds. Fully implement effective and efficient water quality practices and SWM controls.
Financial	Support the area’s “green” economy by ensuring costs of water, sewer, solid waste, energy, and materials are as low as feasible.

The Environment and Sustainability Goals listed above give Sterling Heights a target to strive for over time. It communicates that there is an interest and support from the elected officials to consider sustainable products and practices. It directs the administration to invest time in researching and thoroughly reviewing alternative sustainable solutions alongside the historical or typical approaches. Many sustainable products and practices are cost effective solutions today. Sterling Heights’ Environment and Sustainability Goals recognize that the market is constantly improving the effectiveness and affordability of green alternatives. The emphasis of these goals is to be continuously reviewing and considering sustainable alternatives; and as sustainable practices or products become possible, appropriate and financially feasible, they should be selected. As with all Sterling Heights’ goals and policies, the Environment and Sustainability Goals must be considered within the frame of the City’s overall financial policies and practices. Sterling Heights wishes to continue its long standing reputation for strong financially responsible decision making.





Guiding Principles for Environmental Stewardship

In striving for sustainability, Sterling Heights intends to incorporate the following guiding principles when carrying out its standard processes and activities:

1. Public Dialogue, Education and Outreach

Engage residents and businesses in an ongoing dialogue, including continuous outreach and awareness events and activities, designed to communicate that everyday individual actions do matter. Explore sustainable opportunities and encourage residents to live a more sustainable lifestyle at home and at work.

2. Natural Resource Stewardship

Use no more water, fossil fuels, electricity, natural gas, minerals, wood fiber, paper products, plastics, pesticides, herbicides, chemicals or other resources than is needed in order to accomplish its mission of delivering excellent customer service to residents and visitors.

3. Reduce Pollution

Use a combination of technology and product or process substitution to rework all City activities to ensure they release as little pollution into the air, water, and land as is economically and technologically feasible.

4. Avoid Adverse Environmental Consequences

Protect remaining wildlife habitat and physical environment in Sterling Heights by holistically examining the delivery of City services and activities to ensure that residents are getting the best value for their tax dollars; and, further ensure that adverse environmental consequences are reduced or eliminated. Anticipate and prevent or minimize pollution and waste before they happen.

5. Evaluate the True Cost of Goods and Services

Before committing resources for major purchases, compare the life cycle cost of products by factoring the product's useful life, any operation and maintenance costs over time, and the ultimate disposal costs into the cost comparison. Consider contractors and vendors that use or offer energy-efficient or reused or recycled products and materials as well as manufacturers or vendors that run their activities in a sustainable manner, despite not offering sustainable products. Where all other considerations are equal, support local vendors to minimize transportation costs, environmental pollution and energy consumption. Ensure that materials purchased are high quality, durable and as energy-efficient as feasible.

6. Waste Minimization, Reuse and Recycle

Keep unused, unneeded, or waste materials out of landfills and incinerators by reusing and recycling as much of the City's waste stream as is technically and economically feasible. Support green industries and help create a market for City recyclables by purchasing recycled products for City use. Improve residential and commercial recycling rates by making continuous efforts to improve the public's understanding of the importance of recycling as well as the ease of recycling their own unused, unneeded or waste materials. Make it easy for residents and businesses to recycle and reuse; and challenge them both to ratchet up their own level of recycling to reflect the highest residential and commercial recycling rates that are economically achievable. Continuously reset the bar as technology and recycling processes are improved over time.





7. Environmentally Sustainable Land Use and Development

Incorporate energy savings and environmental protection principles into planning and regulatory processes. Formulate clear expectations for energy use, green building and landscape design and environmental effects in new development, redevelopment and renovations.

8. Sustainable Transportation Patterns and Alternative Transit

Reduce automobile dependence and traffic congestion. Continue to build and enhance alternative transit options into all new or redevelopment plans. Encourage residents to avail themselves of walkways, bike paths and mass transit options.

9. Participate in Partnerships

Seek out and partner with other public, private, and non-profit organizations having a mutual interest in pursuing similar sustainability agendas, including common regional issues and buying products, materials, or services in bulk quantities.

10. Leverage City Resources

Be vigilant in identifying external funding opportunities (local, state, federal, and private dollars) that advance or accelerate the City's sustainability agenda.

11. Network With Others: Interdepartmental and Interagency Collaboration

Share our experiences and expertise with other communities and be open to the wisdom gained by others. Sterling Heights aspires to be a leader in this area, and leadership means exporting our understanding and knowledge once we have acquired it.

12. Promote the "Green" Economy

Seek out opportunities to market the promising local and regional "green" economy through the City's own business practices and through public outreach. Sterling Heights recognizes the significant untapped potential of this market sector and strives to utilize and promote environmental industries, products and services in support of the City's broader economic development goals.





Tracking Our Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability Progress

Sterling Heights has identified a number of potential actions that will move our community closer to sustainability. Administration will develop administrative initiatives to achieve each of these goals over time. Progress will be tracked to ensure these goals are achieved. Therefore, performance measures will be adopted and monitored to inform the public, City Council, and department directors of progress across the topical areas identified below. Information to measure progress will be obtained through internal statistics and analyzed by City staff, and by occasional ad hoc polls and surveys of businesses and residents.

The topical areas are as follows:

1. **Public Dialogue, Education, and Outreach**
2. **Natural Resources Stewardship**
3. **Pollution Reduction**
4. **Water Protection and Conservation**
5. **True Cost Evaluation of Goods and Services**
6. **Waste Minimization, Reuse, and Recycling**
7. **Environmentally Sustainable Land Use and Development**
8. **Sustainable City Fleet Program**
9. **Sustainable City Facilities**
10. **Network with Others: Interdepartmental and Interagency Collaboration**

Conclusions

Sterling Heights is well on its way to becoming a leader in municipal sustainability. Making significant additional progress will require determination, commitment and resources by elected officials, management, and all staff members. Residents also need to support this initiative by actively engaging with staff and identifying creative solutions. Success will require selective investments along the way. However, we are confident that we will succeed, and that Sterling Heights will be an even more desirable place to live, work, and raise a family.

