**Sustainability Services: How Economic Health, Environmental Services and Social Services Join Together to Build Community**

Category: Organizational Design

City of Fort Collins, Colorado

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Consider for Innovation Award – yes

Consider for Rapid Fire Session – yes

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**2013 Transforming Local Government Conference**

**Cool Communities Case Study Presentation Application**

Sustainability is a core philosophy at the City of Fort Collins; one that underpins every City effort, from the smallest of daily tasks to the largest multi-year initiatives. The central premise of any sustainable operation is that it considers human, economic, and environmental factors in decision-making and management. This approach is nothing new to Fort Collins; it has been a part of our culture for years.

Economic, environmental and social sustainability are vital to our community’s success, and our residents expect that we will be responsible stewards of our financial, natural and human resources.

With a new organizational structure, the City of Fort Collins is pioneering a new approach to sustainability; one that models a true integration of economic, environment, and social sustainability. Our old structure included the Economic Health Office in our Financial service area, the Natural Resources Department in our Culture, Parks, Recreation and Environment service area, and our Affordable Housing program within our Planning, Development and Transportation service area.

These three departments intersect regularly, and in recent years have come to work closely on a growing number of major community projects. As these projects developed, it became increasingly clear that a healthy economy, environmental stewardship, and human services for all residents play an equally important role in building quality community, and all contribute to creating a sense of place.

The more these departments worked together, the more we saw the need for those relationships to formalize. Rather than being spread among several service areas, they needed to create one new service area – Sustainability Services – and physically co-locate in order to work most creatively and collaboratively. By combing these three offices into one Sustainability Services area, we are reframing how we approach challenges and build solutions.

Using existing staff and resources, Sustainability Services now includes three departments: Economic Health, Environmental Services, and Social Sustainability. The new service area is indeed innovative. As far as we know, Fort Collins is one of the first – if not the first – municipality to structure our organization to include these three groups under one umbrella.

As such, we have a golden opportunity to break new ground and to drive amazing new programs and improvements.

We are planning for a healthy and resilient economy that includes diverse jobs that enable citizens and businesses to thrive; fosters an innovative, creative, and entrepreneurial atmosphere; and creates strong partnerships and collaboration with the private sector, educational institutions, and other organizations.

We are protecting a healthy and sustainable environment, conserving natural resources, responsibly stewarding our open lands and natural areas, integrating new technologies, and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

And we are committed to developing a high quality built environment within a well-defined community boundary; providing adequate public facilities, services, and infrastructure; supporting opportunities for redevelopment, revitalization, and growth in targeted areas; and creating quality and accessible housing options for all household types and income levels.

**THE MASON CORRIDOR**

One of the projects that most clearly demonstrates the intrinsic relationship among these three departments is the Mason Corridor. Centered along Mason Street, the Corridor is a five-mile north-south byway in the heart of Fort Collins. The Mason Corridor includes a new bicycle and pedestrian trail as well as a new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in a fixed guideway.

The Mason Corridor links major destinations and activity centers including the Downtown commercial, cultural, and business centers, Colorado State University, Foothills Mall, and South College retail areas. Additionally, future regional transit connections will link to the Mason Corridor.

The Corridor also provides a framework for economic development and environmental sustainability, which will create opportunities for new mixed-use and transit-oriented developments that avoid sprawl and enhance our community's active lifestyle. The city is landlocked and is growing 1-2 percent annually, with more 144,000 people in 2012. This important legacy project provides opportunities for infill and economic development.

While the Mason Corridor is perhaps most often described as an economic development project, the Corridor will also be a significant catalyst for many of our environmental and social sustainability goals.

By providing frequent, convenient transportation alternatives through the middle of town, we will reduce traffic congestion and vehicle emissions along our busiest arterial streets. Creating a transit spine will also allow us to streamline our existing bus service, making mass transit a viable option for more of our residents.

The infill and redevelopment projects along the corridor will also provide opportunities to address serious student and low income housing needs within Fort Collins’ core. The City received a letter from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development congratulating us on the project, and citing the opportunities the Corridor offers for more sustainable development, including mixed-income housing, job creation, and other transit-based projects.

**Foothills Mall Redevelopment**

In July 2012, Foothills Mall was purchased by affiliates of Walton Street Capital, a private equity real estate investment firm, and Alberta Development Partners, a Denver-based real estate acquisition. They are committed to redeveloping the aging mall, and restoring it to once again be a shopping and dining destination in Fort Collins.   
  
The mall continues to be a top economic priority for Fort Collins. Over the next several months, developers will work with the City to flesh out redevelopment plans and improvements to the site, enhanced access points, mixed-use development and housing options.

**Midtown Urban Design Plan**

As redevelopment begins along the Mason Corridor, Midtown (a smaller segment of the area) plays an increasingly important role in sustainability efforts. The City of Fort Collins is taking the lead on how private investment and future public partnerships can mold the aesthetics of the area and make sure those projects reflect specific elements that are important to the public.

The Midtown Urban Design Plan will involve public engagement and workshops to create a cohesive vision for the area. The study’s goal is to ensure the City and developers have a clear framework for strategic redevelopment—short term and long term, that supports community goals related to transportation, accessibility, housing, parking, environmental impacts, etc.

The new Sustainability Services increases coordination, accountability, and collaboration with all City departments to achieve our collective sustainability goals. In addition, the service area will increase cooperation with the Fort Collins community in pursuit of innovative alliances and continued improvements in the areas of economic health, environmental services, and social sustainability.

**Presentation Style**

Using photos and video from real-world examples, Fort Collins City Manager Darin Atteberry will share how catalyst projects clearly demonstrate the need for and success of a combined Sustainability Services structure that includes economic, environmental and human services. He will also share the latest progress from these ongoing projects that will shape the future of Fort Collins for years to come.