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Green Cities

By Boone Guyton, member of the WNC Green Building Council

The idea of green cities or cities that strive to become environmentally sustainable is a growing international movement. "A sustainable community is one in which improvement in the quality of human life is achieved in harmony with improving and maintaining the health of ecological systems; and where a healthy economy's industrial base supports the quality of both human and ecological systems."

- Indigo Development

The ongoing revelations about global warming and increased energy costs have raised the stakes in the discussion of how to adapt to the new environmental variables. Global warming is accelerating and the environmental and human health effects are growing. From the melting of the Siberian Tundra to the flooding of the South Pacific Islands, from the increase in asthma from air pollution to the decrease in the tropical rain forest, the human economic systems are having large impacts. Cities are a focal point as they are large collective consumers and polluters while still being connected to local natural resources. About half of the world's population now lives in cities and cities consume about 75% of energy production. Cities are large enough to have a significant influence through incentives and mandates while at the same time having direct democratic input from its citizens.

At the recent Climate Talks in Montreal, Minneapolis Mayor RT Ryback said "Global warming poses a real, urgent threat to our way of life. Solutions to global warming not only improve our environment and health, but also create jobs, spur innovation, and allow government to run more efficiently."

Asheville is surrounded by protected forests and environmental recreation but also has consistent air quality problems and water supply issues. People who have always lived in our area notice the loss of clean streams due to run off from steep slope development as well as the inflating prices of homes and decreased visibility from increased pollution. . These positive and negative factors are a great incentive to promote green approaches to both preserve and improve our environment. Investing in sustainable strategies such as renewable energy, energy conservation, green building, supporting local food supply, alternative

fuels and innovative transportation solutions will result in creating more well paying jobs and the profits from local businesses remain in the community.

In Osage, Iowa Wes Birdsall who managed the Osage Municipal utilities estimated that they spent 350,000 on energy conservation and now save over a million dollars a year in energy costs. Lower energy costs translate into higher profits. (DOE)

Cities are finding myriad solutions to global warming, and finding cost-cutting measures in the process:

- Seattle has purchased nearly 150 hybrid government vehicles, saving money in fuel costs.
- Keene, NH developed and enacted their Local Action Climate Plan, aiming to reduce the city's carbon emissions from transportation, energy use and solid waste by 10 percent.
- Minneapolis, MN recently turned the challenge of an over-crowded police precinct into one of the community's most innovative green buildings, saving over \$10,000 per year in energy costs. (Eben Burnham-Snyder, NRDC)

Asheville, like all cities, cannot prosper without protecting the environmental capital that is the underpinning of all economic activity and our quality of life. Fortunately we already have several groups and programs that are addressing some of our environmental problems. We have

- The Local Foods program as well as Community Supported Agriculture and tailgate markets.
- Blue Ridge Biofuels that provides Biodiesel for both automobiles and home heating
- The new natural Gas filling station
- A well-developed green way plan with 5 miles of green way and 5 more planned
- 885 acres of parks
- A well-established city-recycling program for household waste and diversion of plant waste that accounts for 45% less material going into our landfill.
- The WNC Green Building Council that promotes green building for both residential and commercial buildings.

Pulling together all of our efforts to include innovative transportation, energy conservation and generation, mixed use development and local economic choices Asheville can develop in a way that improves rather than depletes our environment.

For more information about simple things you can do to become more energy efficient or how to become a member or volunteer of the Green Building Council, please visit our web site <http://www.wncgbc.org>. You can find upcoming events, links and information on modern building practices and energy related issues. Please contact us with any questions at: The Green Building Hotline-Call 828-232-5080 or email info@wncgbc.org