

# Putting 'green' plan into action

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In the first two articles on "greener living" we began to define the "what is?" and "what for?" of sustainability, but how do we actually move forward, taking it from a broad-reaching concept to a well-defined plan that can be put into practice?

For a sustainability plan to be viable it must be more than just economically feasible; it has to be clearly beneficial to both the economic development and the quality of life in our community. That is to say it must bring with it economic growth, a positive environmental impact, and provide a better place to do business, work and live to the industries, institutions and individuals that make up our community.

Mayor Tommy Battle understands this and has put together a team whose charge it is to guide this effort toward sustainability. He has been clear and consistent in his message that the "Green 13" team represents just the seed of the city's plan to become economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.

Indeed, this transition to embrace all aspects of sustainable living must be a grass-roots effort that engages all individuals and businesses in Huntsville and the Tennessee Valley region.

This could be somewhat of a challenge in our community where our economy is largely driven by federal dollars through the defense and aerospace industries. The extraordinary economy and quality of life that we enjoy in this region because of these industries could allow us to rest on our laurels and not move as quickly toward sustainability as we should.

On the other hand, this same economy has provided our region with attributes and resources not found anywhere else; specifically, a recession-buffered economy and an unmatched intellectual and technological base. Add to those significant natural resources and a strong sense of community and it is easy to see that we have an incredible opportunity to be a leader in developing and providing a broad range of enabling green technologies and fostering a sustainable culture.

Done right, we have the chance to diversify our economic base and create a better place to live not only for future generations as the discussion often entails but also for our own immediate future. We don't have to, and shouldn't think of "sustainability" or "green" as concepts having only long-term benefits. By being aggressive and thoughtful now, we can develop our own long-term sustainability plan that employs a combination of both forward-looking and identifying and integrating immediately impactful solutions.

At Battle's Green Cities summit May 11, the forum was opened up to attendees to discuss what they felt to be some key areas of sustainability in Huntsville.

Many of the topics commonly associated with being green were put on the agenda including green building, alternative energies and waste management. There were also less often considered topics discussed such as bike friendliness, personalized medicine, the education and training of "green-collar workers," local food production and distribution, healthy buildings, and the leveraging of our technology base for green and sustainable products.

The overarching message to be taken from this is that if we move now to identify areas of importance to us and work as a community to implement and integrate these ideas then we have an opportunity to make the transition on our own terms. We can design and realize a plan that best suits our own economic needs and supports the quality of life we want.

So how do we move toward a well-defined and well-conceived plan? The mayor's summit was a big step in this direction. The topics proposed and discussed there are now being considered and formed into actionable projects. These should serve only as the first steps in this process.

As we learn more and gather more feedback from our community as a whole we should see the development and implementation of a broad range of projects and programs. This column will continue to develop that discussion, each week highlighting an area of critical importance to the conversation on sustainability in Huntsville and the Tennessee Valley Region.

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