

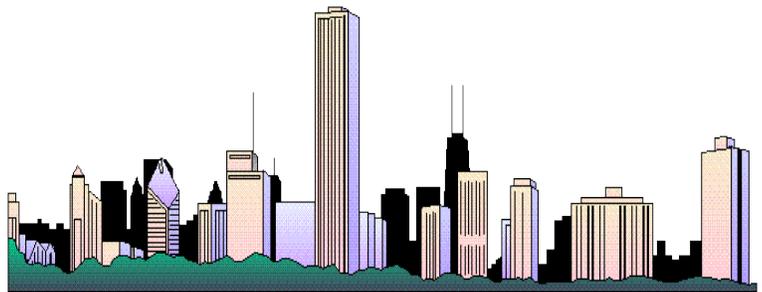
Sustainable Communities

Under construction everywhere

(from *eco-logic* January/February, 1998)

Sustainable Development is defined as *meeting today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. Sustainable Development is, in fact, the process by which societies are being reorganized around the central principle of protecting the environment -- as called for by Al Gore in his 1992 book, *Earth in the Balance*. It is a process that originated in the international community and is now sweeping across America, encompassing small towns and large cities, without legislative authority or legal definition. Congress has never defined, debated nor approved a national policy of sustainable development. Nevertheless, the Executive Branch of the federal government is promoting and implementing the principles of sustainable development through each of its agencies.

In almost every state and in most communities, activities are underway to impose the principles of sustainable development. In only a few communities, are the citizens told that the ideas being advanced come directly from the United Nations. Santa Cruz California openly admits that its vision for the community's future is "Local Agenda 21," and the activity is openly sponsored by the United Nations Association. In Florida, the Department of Community Affairs vehemently denies that its Sustainable Communities Program has anything to do with the United Nations or the President's Council on Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, many of the requirements for participation in the program mirror the recommendations of *Agenda 21* and the President's Council on Sustainable Development.



More often than not, the "visioning" process in local communities tries to avoid any connection to the UN or to *Agenda 21* by adopting positive-sounding names such as "Environment 2000" as in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. In Dover-Foxcroft, Maine, the program is called "Economic Renewal." All sorts of names are used to camouflage the UN's influence on public policies that are being developed for every American city. Regardless of names used to describe the process, the end result looks very similar, whether in Santa Cruz, Birmingham, or St. Louis.

More often than not, the participants in the visioning process are unaware that they are being led through the "collaborative consensus process" to conclusions that were reached in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Professional facilitators are used to lead selected individuals through a process that is intended to validate the recommendations advanced in *Agenda 21*, while appearing to be the ideas and conclusions of the participants.

Both the process and the product are the invention of the United Nations. The process is called consensus building; the product is called a sustainable community. The purpose of the process is to avoid the possibility of rejection by elected officials; the purpose of the product is to create the legal mechanism for managing the lives and affairs of people. The consensus process in every community must have a starting point. While each community's program may evolve differently, each has common characteristics. An individual or an organization affiliated with one or more of the three major international NGOs will assume the responsibility of

initiating the process. (The three major international NGOs are: the International Union for the Conservation of Nature [IUCN]; the World Wide Fund for Nature [WWF]; and the World Resources Institute [WRI]). The initiating organization will sponsor a meeting to which leaders of other NGOs, individual businessmen and other respected community leaders are invited. Frequently, state and federal agency officials are invited. Where there is an elected official with an acceptable environmental track record, he too, is invited. During the initial meetings of the group, care is taken to deliberately exclude individuals who are known to advocate Constitutional values such as private property rights.

The EPA and other federal agencies offer grants to organizations that undertake the visioning process. Frequently the ad-hoc group will organize itself as a not-for-profit organization in order to apply for federal and/or foundation grants. Once funded, the organization is institutionalized and the process of developing a long-range plan for the creation of a sustainable community is underway.

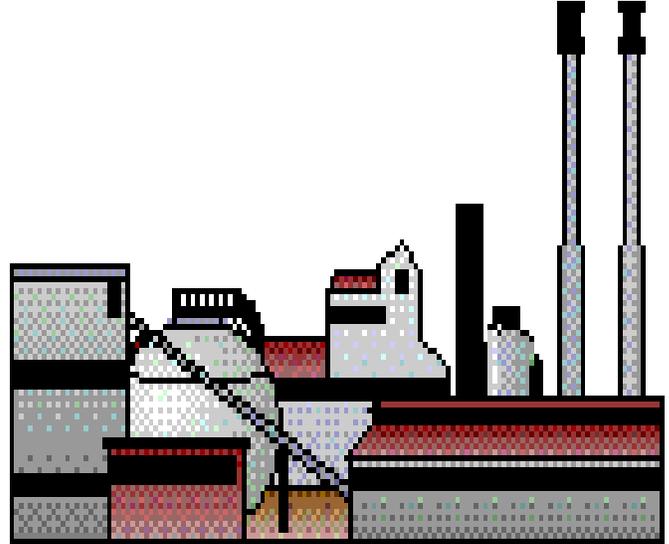
In Santa Cruz, the process took five years. The plan says its purpose is "to make long-term sustainability the driving criterion in every area of human activity and simultaneously alter these human activities for the better." The initiating organizations were ACTION - Santa Cruz County, and the Santa Cruz Chapter of the United Nations Association. Early on, the groups sponsored what they called SEED Summits. SEED stands for Social, Environmental, and Economic Development. The underlying objective of all sustainable development activity is the integration of

economic, equity, and environmental policies. This principle of sustainable development was adopted by the UN through the 1987 World Conference on Environment and Development report entitled *Our Common Future*. The principle was translated into 288 pages of specific recommendations in *Agenda 21*, adopted by the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 at Rio de Janeiro. Those recommendations are now being translated into specific policy actions through groups such as ACTION Santa Cruz in communities across America.

Whatever the program is called in any community in the country, the outcome will be the same. Recommendations will be developed which call for a reduction of fossil fuel energy use with specific recommendations to apply special taxes to fuels and to automobiles based on miles driven. Mass transit, bicycle and pedestrian paths are called for, while automobile travel is penalized. Education is to include "lifelong learning" opportunities and embrace principles of "sustainable" living. Land use is to be strictly governed to prevent "urban sprawl" and to provide for "ecosystem management" -- irrespective of the wishes of private property owners. It is nothing short of amazing that the various plans from the various communities all come out looking so much alike, and so much like the recommendations contained in *Agenda 21*.

One of the usual features of these sustainable communities plans is that they tend to be "transboundary." That is, they tend to embrace more than one political jurisdiction, frequently taking several counties into the plan area. The Charlotte, North Carolina plan, for example, addresses a multi-county area that is described as "one region, one economy, one environmental area, and one society." When such a plan is developed, the organization promoting the plan can call on the local governments within the plan area to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement that allows the organization to review any and all local proposals for coordination with the overall plan. Too frequently, local city councils, or county commissions, are reluctant to adopt programs or policy proposals that are not "approved" by the coordinating organization.

Federal programs such as the American Heritage Rivers Initiative, the Vice President's Watershed Initiative, the Department of Transportation's Scenic By-ways Program, and several others, are woven into the fabric of the sustainable community vision. Jacksonville Mayor, John Delaney is actively seeking recognition of the St. Johns River as an American Heritage River without realizing that such a designation would give the coordinating organization the authority to actually set land use and river use policy, thereby by-passing the elected officials who are elected expressly to make such policy decisions. He thinks that the American Heritage Rivers Initiative is nothing more than a "beauty contest" to recognize America's great rivers. Were he to read *Agenda 21*, and *Sustainable America: A New Consensus*, he might realize that the program is just another innocent-sounding effort to strip local elected officials of their governing power and transfer that power to non-elected bureaucrats and non-governmental organizations, operating at the behest of federal agencies that are operating at the behest of the United Nations.



Across the land, *Agenda 21* is being implemented. Elected officials at every level are being co-opted by the sophistication of a well-devised international strategy that is being implemented locally. Absent from all these visions of the future are the fundamental values on which America was built: freedom for individuals to live where they choose, drive what they choose, and do what they choose. Present in all these visions of the future is the notion that Maurice Strong advanced during the Rio conference in 1992: "We cannot pursue our futures solely as isolated individuals or as isolated sovereign nations." Sustainable communities will ensure that individuals and nations pursue the future only along the paths deemed "sustainable" by those self-appointed bureaucrats who think they know what is best for the world.

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