

Renewable Energy & Eastern Oregon Landscape Conservation

(REECon) Partnership

DRAFT Document

Initial thoughts on defining *Community Sustainability* from Judge Grasty:

Because so many of the “environmental” problems (perceived or real) being raised at various levels have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in finding solutions that work and are sustainable. Local authorities and residents construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist in implementing national and sub-national environmental policies. As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote solutions on the ground. Those solutions are the ones that will result in the greatest impact to long term sustainability and sustainable development.

In many cases throughout Oregon environmental conditions are very good and when they are; it is as a result of the local communities and the local resident’s efforts. Whether the goal is to sustain both the environmental and community or the goal is to restore some aspect of one or the other it requires human involvement. Communities are both the means and the suppliers of that human need and are essential to achieve sustainability of both the environment and communities.

Making a community sustainable means integrating economic development, community development and environmental protection. In sparsely populated areas this cannot be achieved without the direct involvement of the local government, the locally elected officials. Building sustainable communities requires a proactive, localized and highly participatory approach that depends upon the unique role and capabilities of local government. It is true that many local governments operate using principles, processes and practices that advance sustainability. While not specifically identified in the Oregon Land Use process sustainability is definitely an outcome of that process. Some rural communities are integrated to a certain degree with local Native American residents (communities within communities in some cases), the teachings of those folks talk about making decisions for seven generations. That message is heard and understood by those communities and while not written into law or ordinance it is a common theme in decision making.

For the triangle of Social, Economic and Environmental to be achieved NGO’s focused on environmental needs, state and federal agencies must accept city and county government as a respected partner in their decision making processes. This means that sustainability requires increased coordination of policies and activities, broadened stakeholder involvement, and most significantly a concern for the long-term impacts of our decisions at all levels of government and public involvement. Communities understand this and must work towards it on a daily basis, agencies must respect that fact and allow/encourage the participation.

The idea of sustainable development may be important to discuss. For some folks development is viewed as a negative; meaning land development and construction and may be viewed as loss of habitat. In Oregon land development review and planning are city and county responsibilities. All Counties and cities have developed a “comprehensive plan use plan” to guide development with a focus on protecting land, agricultural lands in particular. Most of those plans (and the decisions based on these plans) consider at a local level development’s impact on long term sustainability, this is always true of the decisions made by decision makers for land use. To be honest sustainability was not at the forefront when the comp plans were developed but the intent of long term protection of land, open space, human needs and those of our states wildlife are clear in those same plans and in state law. It is important for us to see that sustainable development requires attention to municipal economic,

environmental and community actions, beyond land use planning. Local government lives this fact on a daily basis and it is a common theme in all decision making.

Why are local communities important on a broader perspective about our national or even worldwide environmental conditions? Sustainable communities meet their current needs without compromising other species and future generations. Cities and counties make day-to-day decisions affecting the sustainability of their community, the environment and ultimately the planet. That is why world leaders recognized this fact and included those local communities' decades ago. They recognized that local decision making was at the forefront of sustainability. This recognition occurred in the global action plan signed at the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro. The section dealing with the powers and responsibilities of cities and counties is known as Local Agenda 21*.

Sustainability efforts are occurring at all levels, within communities, private business and government at all levels (local, state and federal). I only have to listen to the major of advertisements today to recognize businesses interest and involvement with the "green" agenda. Individuals, local community-based organizations, industry and other groups are doing their part in this effort and are driving decisions of cities and counties through democracy. Sustainability is the responsibility of all but being implemented at a local level thus local input is critical.

Definitions:

Community Sustainability is defined as assuring the long term ability of local residents, services and culture to work in harmony with the environment in and around that community. From all aspects it should also help achieve tangible improvements in global sustainability with a balanced focus on environmental, economic and social conditions through cumulative local actions.

Local..... used to describe local decision making I use it to identify the two layers of government closest to the people. City and County elected bodies. *Cities within their boundaries and Counties in their boundaries, but generally outside of city limits.*

Communities A geographic area defined by a close connection of the people in that area. This connection may be geographic, economic or cultural. In most rural example throughout Oregon, communities are defined as all within county AS WELL AS local areas/groups within that county.

City and County government..... for the purposes of this paper I define this as the local elected officials representing their citizens.

Local Sustainability means that an area operates in a way that communities can use energy and natural resources efficiently and equitably, for both present and future generations of humans and other species.

* While Local agenda 21 goes well past the intent of this paper it is interesting to note that local communities were recognized in their importance almost two decades ago.