

Executive Director's Message

Sustainability Offers the Biggest Bang for Your City's Buck

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by Chris McKenzie

Last month in his Western City column, League President Jim Madaffer discussed the League's strategic priorities for 2008; they also appear on page 4. Jim's column looked in detail at issues related to the infrastructure priority. In this column, I examine another priority -- sustainability.

Specifically, this priority calls for the League to support green and sustainable cities by leading in the development of state and local policies, strategies and programs to protect the environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions through:

- More efficient and sustainable land use and building practices;
- Increased energy efficiency and use of alternative/renewable energy sources;
- Improved water supply and wastewater treatment system efficiencies;
- Expanded public transit opportunities; and
- Innovations in other city operations.

As we work to make our cities better places to live, increasing energy efficiency and promoting sustainability are important strategies. Not only do they reduce a community's carbon footprint, they also provide long-term cost savings of tax payer dollars. According to a 2003 State of California report, *The Costs and Financial Benefits of Green Buildings*, the financial benefit of building green exceeds the cost by a factor of 10-to-1.

California is at the forefront of a worldwide effort to tackle the causes and consequences of global warming. The state has set ambitious goals in AB 32 to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020, and to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

California Climate Action Network Offers Resources

These strong state goals require effective local action. The California Climate Action Network (CCAN) was created to help California communities play a leadership role both in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for climate change consequences. CCAN is a program of the Institute for Local Government that helps local officials, technical experts, community leaders and others share information, access available resources and work together on innovative climate action programs. These networks help create and strengthen local and regional partnerships to take action on global warming.

CCAN provides useful information about the science of climate change, strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and related policy issues on its website at www.ca-ilg.org/climatechange. I encourage you to explore the site and take advantage of its many resources.

Collecting Sustainable Cities Stories

Priority Focus, the League's weekly electronic legislative update, has added a new feature to highlight a variety of green tactics that cities are using. Sharing these stories regularly helps cities learn from each other about what works and find a network to tap into when implementing programs locally.

We want to hear from you about how your city is engaged in efficiency innovation. Tell us about how your city has converted its fleet to clean natural gas, installed solar on city buildings, developed a water treatment system to recycle grey water for irrigation, launched a public awareness campaign to encourage residents to conserve energy or undertaken any other type of sustainable initiative. League Communications Director Eva Spiegel is looking forward to sharing your city's story in this new feature. Contact her at espiegel@cacities.org.

Thinking Globally -- Acting Locally

What is happening in California is also part of a larger effort focusing on sustainable cities nationwide. In California and throughout the nation, local leaders are embracing the challenges of addressing climate change. They are providing real leadership in developing and implementing innovative programs and services to reduce the carbon footprint of local government operations and their entire city or county.

At the League's 2007 Annual Conference, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels spoke to city officials about the work he is doing in his city and in promoting the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. This agreement's goal is to implement the Kyoto Protocol goals locally, and hundreds of cities have signed on so far, including many from California.

Signatory cities agree to:

- Strive to meet or beat the Kyoto Protocol targets in their own communities through actions ranging from anti-sprawl land use policies to urban forest restoration projects and public information campaigns;
- Urge their state governments and the federal government to enact policies and programs to meet or beat the greenhouse gas emission-reduction target suggested for the United States in the Kyoto Protocol -- a 7 percent reduction from 1990 levels by 2012; and
- Urge the U.S. Congress to pass the bipartisan greenhouse gas reduction legislation, which would establish a national emission trading system.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors launched the Mayors' Climate Protection Center to administer the agreement. Visit <http://usmayors.org/climateprotection> to find out how your city can participate.

California is Nation's Incubator of Innovation

California serves as the nation's bellwether on many fronts. Its innovations, whether technological or cultural, spread rapidly to other states and nations. It isn't surprising that our state is working to address the impacts of climate change, challenging policies at every level of government. AB 32 is a prime example of California's leadership on this issue.

In their discussions about climate change, state and local policy initiatives to reduce global warming, and how to balance these goals with the League's mission to restore and protect local control, the League board is keenly aware the public is demanding -- and deserves action on -- climate change. It is also clear that those who do not lead in this area will soon be told what to do. That is why the League is engaging so actively in seeking productive amendments to legislation like SB 375 (Steinberg) and working with our state partners to ensure that how local and regional agencies plan and control California's future growth will have the most manageable impact on our planet. (For more about SB 375, visit www.westerncity.com/sb375.)

We live in one of the most exciting laboratories of democracy in the world. California's response to the sustainability challenge will be profoundly shaped by the collective impact of all its 478 cities. Each city's efforts to be greener and more sustainable have the power to improve the quality of life locally as well as statewide, nationally and globally.