

MINUTES

Sustainable Business Initiative Task Force
City Council Chamber—Eugene City Hall

December 13, 2005
7 p.m.

PRESENT: Rusty Rexius, David Funk, co-chairs; Lisa Arkin, Roger Ebbage, Lynn Feekin, Mark Miksis, Terry McDonald, Deb Noble, Scott Pope, Randy Ross, Claudia Villegas, task force members; Mayor Kitty Piercy; Bob Doppelt, Sara Mazzie, Research Innovations.

ABSENT: Kartar Khalsa, Josh Bruce, task force members.

Mayor Piercy called the meeting of the Sustainable Business Initiative (SBI) Task Force to order.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Funk welcomed those present and asked members of the task force to introduce themselves.

2. Overview of Sustainable Business Initiative

Mr. Rexius provided an overview of the SBI. He said that the initiative was part of Mayor Piercy's economic development plan. The primary focus of the initiative was job creation and job retention. Related to that were the social capacity in the form of the people who lived in the community, as well as the environment. Those were inseparable from job creation and retention. The focus of the SBI in terms of was sustainable business. The task force had looked at several such sectors, such as organic foods and natural products. The task force had asked people what the City could do to enhance, encourage, and cooperate with such businesses. Mr. Rexius said the task force was charged to listen to the experts on the subject and develop a set of recommendations to forward to the City Council regarding what it could do to promote sustainable business.

Mr. Rexius said the Town Hall was intended to solicit general comment on what the task force had not yet considered and areas on which it could focus.

Mr. Funk noted that the task force was using a process called Appreciative [sic] Inquiry and it was currently in the discovery or listening phase. He said the task force might seek clarification from the speakers about their remarks, and was seeking all the ideas it could.

3. Format of Town Hall Meeting

Mr. Rexius reviewed the format of the meeting, noting that speakers would be given three minutes to speak.

Mr. Rexius noted the task force had also discussed sustainable business practices and how to help businesses enhance and improve their own businesses with more sustainable practices. While that was not directly related to job creation, to the extent that businesses could enhance their own operations they became more competitive and hence more able to retain employees.

4. Public Comment

Jan Spencer, 212 Benjamin Street, welcomed the Town Hall opportunity. He noted his submittal of e-mail testimony some time past. He called for a conservation economy that would stimulate local creativity around a clearly defined civic goal. He said a public education campaign would be necessary for citizens to understand what was at stake. He said that he had lobbied for a roundtable on urban land use. He thought that sites such as brownfields should be inventoried and all could be partners for a greener economy. Mr. Spencer advocated for individuals to work closer to their homes and to become less auto-centric in order to keep money in the local economy. He expressed confidence that a well-defined public education campaign would bring people out. He endorsed the creation of a local investment bank and called for the construction of more green buildings. Mr. Spencer said that with a more sustainable economy, the community would be less dependent on erratic global oil supplies, and would enjoy improved health with cleaner air and water. An engaged public would stimulate civic vitality.

Ms. Arkin asked about efforts to redevelop brownfields. Mayor Piercy indicated the City had the enterprise zone to encourage the redevelopment of brownfields. Mr. Spencer noted Mr. McDonald's experience with cleaning a brownfield when St. Vincent de Paul built the Aurora Building.

Joy Gibson, 2123 West 15th Court, emphasized the positive aspects of value added wood products. She asked if the task force had looked at furniture design and manufacturing using sustainably harvested wood, certified as sustainable. She believed that two companies in Portland did just that and could be considered as models. She said that on a larger scale, there was a southern Oregon consortium of furniture designers and manufacturers. She suggested that Eugene could do similar thing here to increase the visibility of such firms, create jobs, and create apprenticeship opportunities.

Mr. Doppelt said that the task force had been doing considerable research on the topic mentioned by Ms. Gibson and was planning a roundtable on the field at the end of January 2006. He said that he had done a lot of talking with different companies but found only six or eight groups interested. He invited Ms. Gibson's participation.

Mr. Funk encouraged those present to visit the SBI web site and fill out the survey.

Greg Topham, 3656 Village Avenue, #5, identified himself as a small business owner working on a domestic automatic and control engine, a control engine for the house of the future. It was an open source software product designed around older computers and the core system would control a home's heating and lighting systems. He asked if the task force would consider placing a stamp of approval on his product to increase his chances of getting investors and finding grant dollars. Mr. Funk indicated that the task force would have to learn more and invited him to contact task force members.

Mr. Ross arrived.

Gavin McComas, 1350 East 25th Avenue, said that Eugene must find way to build and protect the local economy by protecting local retailers from big box chain stores. He recalled times when there were more independent retail stores and more opportunity for residents to interact with the operators. New retail stores shift consumer spending from one part of town to another part of town. A big box store can only have success at the expense of independent stores. He maintained that independently owned stores keep more money in the local economy, create a sense of space and community identify, and reflect the local culture. Big box stores sap communities of their character. The loss of independent businesses was not inevitable. Many communities focus on local stores and restrict the size of new stores or prohibit it altogether. Eugene needs an economic and community impact to screen potential new businesses.

Ray Wolfe, 1413 Luella Street, said he had been disappointed to learn that Mayor Torrey's Economic Development Committee was deprived of the report of the West Eugene Enterprise Zone Committee. He suggested the task force review the documents in question. He recommended a book entitled *The Great American Jobs Scam*. He asked the task force to keep the environment in mind as well as the importance of a sense of community and suggested that local stores be encouraged to identify locally produced products.

Mr. Rexius noted that he was on Mayor Torrey's committee, and two of its recommendations were adopted: the enterprise zone and the commercial lands study. The committee also recommended an ombudsman, which the task force had heard a need for, and a review of the City's code requirements. He said he would share that report with the task force.

Doug McClaughry, Local Buildings Construction Trades Council, 4748 Franklin Boulevard, asked the task force to consider the construction industry as a part of sustainable development. He said the council had a booklet called Build Oregon Responsible that it shared with members and focused on responsible contractors. He cited some examples of the guidelines in the booklet. Mr. McClaughry provided copies of the booklet. He looked forward to the council's meeting with the task force in January.

Mark Rabinowitz, 28549 Sutherlin Road, urged the task force to differ between sustainability and efficiency. He said the task force needed to remember that smart growth is not sustainability. He likened earth to Apollo 13 and said people must repair the damage. He recommended relocating production and changing the building code so that passive solar was a requirement and not an option. He said the City should turn off the lights at the library that aimed at the sky. There were more jobs in renewables than in fossil fuel. The community needed to reconsider the use of fossil fuels. The community needed to change its priorities and build a permanent place for a farmers market rather than support Whole Foods. He urged the task force to think in the long-term.

John Hofer thought the task force's agenda was fairly narrow and suggested that only a few trees in the forest were being considered. He suggested a broader examination was in order as there were trends affecting sustainability in Eugene. For example, the upcoming retirement of the baby boom generation, who will want to downsize their houses and drive fewer miles. He described his experience in selling his house and attempting to buy a smaller and more efficient house at a reasonable price. However, he found mostly traditional family housing. He found that he was not unique, and learned that such housing was not being built due to profit. He acknowledged that not all people would want what he wanted. Create new distinct housing for boomers and then competition for housing would become less. He asked the task force to look at these trends and find ways to take advantage of the opportunities they represent.

Lisa Warnes, 5020 Nectar Way, expressed concern about population growth in Eugene. She moved to Eugene in 1980 to escape California's urban sprawl. She did not like the growth that Eugene had experienced since she moved to the community. She perceived a dwindling amount of wetlands and forests as a result of growth. She interpreted sustainability as protecting the environment, keeping forests intact, and not developing agriculture lands. Ms. Warnes complained that people did not seem to be bicycling and walking as much as they used to. She asked how growth would be balanced with the environment. She opposed the West Eugene Parkway and did not see it as the solution to the traffic problems that existed. She was also concerned about air quality in the valley and asked what the task force was going to do about that. She supported appointing people to positions on agencies such as the Lane Regional Air Pollution Agency (LRAPA) who had air quality in mind as opposed to the cost to businesses. She also supported electric vehicles and said people should have incentives for using public transportation. She also wanted to prohibit large houses on large lots as she believed that threatened the land supply.

Kathy Ging, PO Box 11245, Eugene, recommended the online newsletter Greenclips to the task force and urged members to look at the newsletter's archives. She also recommended the City hire B. J. Harris to assist the task force, and Avory Levins to assist businesses. She recommended the Web sites Responsibleshopper.com and Homepower.com. She recommended that land use roundtables be held by Jan Spencer. She asked what sustainability meant in light of rising electricity prices and asked if wood stoves would be outlawed in the future. Ms. Ging noted that the Willamette Valley contains many nurseries and she suggested the task force consider the value of that sector. She also mentioned the International Mycological Conference held in Astoria as another potential source for information about a sustainable business. Ms. Ging questioned why so few minorities or women were invited to participate on the roundtables.

Mr. Ross expressed appreciation for the remarks of Ms. Ging.

Wendy Stragar, 85250 McBeth Road, said she had started a small natural products company, Good Clean Fun, and noted that it was very difficult to start a company. She sold products all over the country. Her products were identified as local products in Eugene and she thought that helped sell them. She said that there were many people in Eugene doing interesting things but they did not know each other or how to get help from each other. She said "sign me up" for such an effort. Knowing that there was so many interesting things occurring made her feel less depressed about the environment. She suggested that Eugene could attract more businesses by establishing a green incubator and could revitalize downtown that way. A developer with a conscience could give up some space for the purpose. She said that those who helped establish such incubators in other communities would be willing to help. She would be interested in locating to such an incubator. She suggested that Lane Community College could help. Ms. Stragar suggested a "Coop Eugene" stamp could be placed on local sustainable products. She recommended the task force get in touch with the Social Venture Network, through which some money was available.

Mr. Doppelt said that he would connect Ms. Stragar with the participants of the natural products roundtable, who were hoping to form a small association.

Responding to a question from Mr. McDonald, Ms. Stragar suggested that the incubator could initially accommodate about ten businesses.

Amy Pincus Merwin, 2220 Sandy Drive, suggested a concept known as "Thrive and Survive." She said the valley could grow many more products if farmers had the incentive to do so. She said that fiber and food could be grown and products channeled to Eugene producers and manufacturers. She said grass seed produced air pollution, grass pollen that adversely affected many people, and herbicides. She recommended the task force talk to farmers about being organic and sustainable. She needed the City's density rules lifted; if she wanted to build a cottage on her property she could not. Why could she only live with a relative next door? She said that such an approach would help the City achieve its density goals quickly and easily. She also noted the models that existed in San Francisco through the provision of solar to any house willing to take it. People could put solar collectors on their roofs and pay for them through net metering. Once paid for, families could benefit.

Ms. Pincus noted that she was a founder of Coop America. There were many local resources to call upon, such as presenters from the Green Conference. She believed in public education and said a green business campaign would be terrific.

Ms. Arkin asked if the task force had inventoried agriculture lands used to grow food and those who were not, and if the City was reaching out to Lane County to create such an inventory. Mr. McDonald said that farmer Paul Atkinson had conducted such a survey, and it was available now.

Ms. Noble noted that nothing like canola could be grown within a certain distance of a grass seed field, so changes in State law would be needed.

Mr. Pope invited more ideas from Ms. Pincus on green education.

Fred Collier, 485 East 32nd Avenue, suggested a way to encourage solar panels was to start installing two-way meters as a standard practice. He endorsed Mr. MComas's remarks related to big box stores and said the incubator idea was a very good one and was an idea that should be invested in. He suggested that big box stores could be discouraged by adoption of a council resolution that stated big box corporations were not people under the law.

Mosha Immerman, 1290 McLean Boulevard, spoke of the threat of global warming and the need to stay focused and aware of what could be done in response. He urged a focus on common ground that all shared. He thought there was conflict between green business and making a lot of money. He suggested the City could do more to make green business more profitable through tax incentives and incubators. He encouraged the task force to consider what other countries were doing. He agreed that air quality was very important and maintained that residents were breathing acid air from Hyundai. Manufacturers of such products should not be in Eugene where there was so much asthma. He was working on a carbon tax proposal and said there was a prize for the first city to adopt it. The tax would reward people and provide government with stable funding. He maintained that people would be eager to pay the tax. He encouraged task force members to call him at 954-9128.

Joe Esker, 81858 Lost Valley Road, Lost Valley Center, supported all the ideas that had been suggested. He particularly liked those related to businesses practices and he liked the idea of relocalization. He said that people in the Dexter-Lowell area were working on a grass roots effort to bring people together in local trade/barter system. He encouraged consideration of strengthening systems already in place and the establishment of a formal clearing house where people could learn about what products they could order locally. He suggested a local currency system could be employed as was in Corvallis and Ithaca, New York, which was also considering a local health care coop. Mr. Esker believed that such things strengthened the fabric of the local community.

Steven Lamb, 2385 Adams Street, suggested that the task force encourage sustainable transportation between work and home, noting that it was often difficult to find a bicycle parking space, suggesting a City-sponsored study of where bicycle racks and financial incentives to businesses to provide bicycle racks.

Michael McNeely, 1292 High Street, #134, recalled reading that a Japanese company was paying its employees to walk to work. He suggested that might be feasible for Eugene if bicycles were included. He suggested that taxi cab companies with a permit to serve the airport could be encouraged to have environmentally friendly vehicles, such as hybrids. He suggested a license plate campaign be considered to help subsidize the task force's recommendations. He asked if the task force had considered a public education campaign related to the Olympic Trials.

Mr. Doppelt indicated a bicycle round table was under discussion and would likely occur and the incentives mentioned by Mr. McNeely would likely be discussed at such a forum. He said that several people have discussed trying to turn the upcoming Olympic Trials to be held in Eugene into a zero waste event. He did not know the status of that effort. Mr. Rexius confirmed that the organizers of the trials had discussed such an approach.

Mr. Pope noted the bus and bicycle subsidies currently paid by many local employers and said that paying employees to walk to work was not that uncommon.

Daniel Henderson, 215 East 2nd Avenue, Apartment 7, suggested that the task force consider the Jean Vollum EcoTrust building in Portland as a benchmark. He suggested that if the right coalition could be assembled, it could champion such a project and perhaps build on the success of the new fire station and the 5th and Pearl development. He thought someone in the Lillis Business complex would be happy to follow-up on any research requests. He acknowledged the Lillis complex was partially shaded but was the first business school in the United States that had been LEED-certified.

Mr. Funk asked for any comments from the task force.

Mr. Pope asked Mr. Rabinowitz to speak to the psychological barriers that sustainability faced. Mr. Rabinowitz asserted that the barriers were caused by the fact the United States was a propagandized society where people were taught there were no limits to growth and that there was a “limited hangout,” where there was a problem but also a “fallback to the official story” that steered people away from looking at what was really needed. He said society must shift its world view to find the solutions that were already mostly there. They would not “keep the gravy train of endless growth going.”

Mr. Pope noted that EWEB was sponsoring the Northwest Earth Institute workshop on Ecological Morning.

Speaking to the remarks of Ms. Pincus, Ms. Noble noted that tax credits were available for the installation of solar panels, and the loans for those projects were very attractive.

Mr. Ebbage thought the SBI effort a “real cool thing” and part of that was the audience’s involvement and turn out. He congratulated the audience for being there. Ms. Arkin concurred. She liked the synergy and said it was what the community needed.

Mr. Ross also expressed appreciation at the effort and wished everyone could be more cooperative and do some collective thinking that did not have profit at its forefront.

Mr. Funk concurred with the remarks of Mr. Ebbage and Ms. Feekin. He said that every SBI-related meeting he had attended had taught him a great deal. He noted a second town hall would be scheduled. He reiterated that the survey was available on the Web site, and provided the Web site address.

Mr. Doppelt provided another Web address and his phone number 346-1649.

Mayor Piercy thanked those in attendance for coming to the meeting. She said that many people had come into the contact with the initiative and many good ideas had come forward that would probably be discussed by the task force, while other ideas would be fostered outside the task force setting. Mayor Piercy emphasized the task force’s commitment to the topic.

Mr. Doppelt also thanked those in attendance. He shared some of the initiatives that had arisen out of the roundtables. Those included the establishment of a one-stop shopping information source, which Mr. Ebbage had agreed to follow-up on through development of a Web site; a clearer definition of sustainability; and City identification of sustainable businesses as a priority, backed up with specific initiatives. He challenged the audience to provide the task force with the most specific ideas members could think of. Mr. Doppelt noted that several of the roundtables decided to form associations, which was important to the concept of creating business clusters. A report summarizing progress so far would be placed on the Web site.

Mr. Rexius said he recognized many people in the audience who were in the business of sustainability and urged the audience members to go buy something from them.

The meeting adjourned at 8:41 p.m.

(Recorded by Kimberly Young)