

MINUTES

Mayor's Sustainable Business Initiative Task Force
Rogue and Columbia Rooms—Valley River Inn—1000 Valley River Way
Eugene, Oregon

November 15, 2005
7:30 a.m.

PRESENT: Dave Funk, Rusty Rexius, chair; Josh Bruce, Julie Daniel, Roger Ebbage, Lynn Feekin, Deb Noble, Scott Pope, Jack Roberts, Claire Syrett, Claudia Villegas, Jack Roberts, members; Bob Doppelt, Sara Mazzie, Ray Neff, University of Oregon, Institute for a Sustainable Environment; City Manager Dennis Taylor; Assistant City Manager Jim Carlson.

ABSENT: Lisa Arkin, Terry McDonald, Mark Miksas, Randy Ross, Kartar Khalsa, members.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Funk called the meeting of the Sustainable Business Initiative (SBI) Task Force to order and welcomed those present. Task force members introduced themselves.

2. Items from Task Force Members

Mr. Doppelt noted that a Public Service Announcement had been produced for radio to promote the survey. He thanked Mr. Miksas for his work on the PSA.

Mr. Doppelt solicited volunteers to make a presentation on the initiative to the Neighborhood Leaders Council on November 22.

Mr. Doppelt noted that the case studies document was in draft form and he invited feedback.

Mr. Doppelt reviewed the meeting schedule.

3. Approval of Minutes of October 25, 2005

Because several members had not had the opportunity to review the minutes, this item was postponed.

4. Comments and Discussion about Roundtables

Mr. Funk said he had been impressed with how discussion at the roundtables progressed and the synergy created by the roundtable, leading to other outside initiatives.

Mr. Doppelt reported that Lane Community College (LCC) had agreed to develop a sustainability training program. He was meeting with representatives of LCC to discuss that. He also reported that the participants of the organic foods roundtable were discussing forming an association.

5. Goals, Format, and Outcome of Meeting

Members briefly discussed the meeting with the chamber and its committees. Mr. Doppelt reviewed the meeting agenda and format, and called members' attention to the packet prepared for the meeting.

Mr. Funk briefly reported on a meeting that he and the mayor had with members of the City's public information staff to discuss public outreach regarding the initiative. He anticipated a second meeting to clarify the focus of the outreach.

6. Wrap-up and Next Steps

The task force adjourned to the Columbia Room.

7. SBI Task Force Meeting with Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce.

The task force met with members of the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Rexius reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

Those present introduced themselves, and David Hauser of the chamber provided a brief history of the chamber and overviewed its membership, mission, and current activities.

Mr. Funk suggested that the community was entering a new economy, which featured the rise of China as an economic power, declining access to oil, climate change, and increased oil prices. In that context, Mayor Kitty Piercy began the SBI Task Force process and solicited the assistance of Mr. Funk and Mr. Rexius as co-chairs of the task force. Mr. Doppelt of Research Innovations was also lending his expertise to the process. The initiative had several goals, including that of educating the business community about how to shift to sustainable business practices to increase profits, decrease expenses, and create better working conditions for employees, and to attract new sustainable businesses to the community. Mr. Funk said the initiative was scheduled to take 18 months to complete, and the task force was currently in the discovery process. It had been meeting since June and had held a series of roundtables on various sustainable business sectors. Those roundtables had created a sort of synergy in the community that was leading to other efforts outside the task force.

Mr. Funk said the community needed to look forward together, and he encouraged those present to get behind the initiative. He believed the initiative could have come from the chamber if circumstances had been different. He emphasized the business focus of the initiative.

Mr. Doppelt called attention the packet of materials prepared for the meeting, which contained a document summarizing the SBI and provided examples of the recommendations that were emerging from the roundtables. He said the recommendations ranged from educating the public about sustainable business practices to revising the City's permitting processes. A second document was entitled *Definitions, Benefits, and Case Studies of Sustainable Business Practices and Products*.

Mr. Doppelt reviewed the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development definition of sustainability: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." He suggested sustainability could be considered as a closed loop system where materials and energy could be used as efficiently as possible and then recirculated into another economic use or back into nature.

He cited worm composting as an example of a closed loop system. In such systems nothing, including human capital, was wasted.

Mr. Doppelt reviewed the roundtable topics, noting that the upcoming roundtable was on growing the natural products industry.

Mr. Doppelt briefly spoke of the triple bottom line, which encouraged people to think of issues in terms of the economy, the environment, and social equity, and called attention to the benefits of the triple bottom line provided in the written materials. He emphasized the cost savings that many companies experienced by moving toward more sustainable business practices.

A member of the chamber commented that people fear that process will go to extremes. He hoped that the task force would produce something that was non-regulatory in nature that encouraged change rather than mandated it. He said that education was needed, and encouraged the task force not to move too far, too fast, or it would create a roadblock rather than a pathway. Mr. Doppelt determined that many in the room shared the concern.

Mr. Doppelt solicited additional comments.

- My family owns a golf course and has cooperated with the National Audubon Society in managing the property for wildlife as well as recreation, including native tree plantings. There should be some recognition from the City for such efforts in the form of “attaboys” for businesses that try to do the right thing. In my experience, the City of Eugene does not support or recognize such efforts.

Mr. Doppelt asked what form such recognition would take.

- The City could be a problem solver as opposed to be a permitter or rule setter. The City needs to shed its bad reputation. It was critical to partnering with the business community.
- If we want change it will occur over time. Some sustainable practices, such as green buildings, were difficult for small businesses to afford or justify. The initiative is an opportunity to bring different views together. The City needs to examine its practices if it wants the SBI to work. There is a difference between what the City says and what it does.
- When companies meet or exceed regulations, the community should find some way to recognize them and publicize those efforts.
- The business community complains about a lack of flexibility in rule making while also arguing that regulations should be “cut and dried” and not left to staff discretion. There’s a conflict there, and the business community needed to recognize the challenge faced by the public sector in that regard.
- Many businesses say they want recognition but they are also afraid of the publicity and attention it would attract. How do we get around that?
- Businesses are not asking for a gold star but rather government appreciation of businesses it works with. For example, I submit construction plans with an engineer’s seal and then am informed that my plans are not complete. Another example is tree cutting—I should be able to remove a tree without having to apply for a permit. That’s the kind of recognition a business wants to see because it demonstrates value for a business owner’s time and a willingness to partner.
- Another example is a recent application for a car wash, which is sustainable business because of water recycling and stormwater reduction but after going through the application process I was told that the property lacked a stormwater permit. I was told I would have to spend several thousand dollars to study and mitigate the runoff and install stormwater facilities. Subsequently, my company hired a former City employee who found the missing stormwater per-

mit on file. No City employee took the time. The City consistently demonstrates a lack of willingness to work with businesses.

Mr. Doppelt asked what the task force could do to address the issues that had been raised.

- Recommend a parallel fast-track permitting process for businesses that meet the definition of being sustainable.
- The question goes back to the issue of business owners wanting to be in charge of their business decisions. Businesses fear that government will attempt to dictate their business practices. Your biggest challenge will be getting businesses to believe you will encourage them in shifting to sustainable business practices, not dictate to them.
- If the City does not grow businesses could be in trouble. The homebuilding industry was in danger of collapse because of the lack of buildable land in the urban growth boundary (UGB), which had an effect on suppliers and related businesses who wish to be sustainable but without a market have a difficult time doing so. In the past the City had planned for growth through its urban reserves. The City needed to be honest about the available land and its actual development potential. How can sustainability work with so much angst about expanding the UGB when all the data showed the community was lagging behind the goal of having a 20-year buildable land supply?
- If business does not have a market, a key factor to sustainability goes away. If businesses want to expand, what do they do? It seems like a good idea to look at that and have a reasonable planned strategy to make sure that businesses that wish to expand can do so. The community needs to get over its resistance to actually planning for growth.
- Sustainability means growth occurs in a certain way. The community needs land for both residential and business purposes.

Mr. Funk noted that the issue of the UGB had come up before in the roundtable discussions, but the task force believed it had to draw a line somewhere given all the topics that had been raised. He said that it was possible the issue would still be addressed given all the interest that had been expressed.

- There are basic fundamentals attached to any economic initiative, such as land, work force, and the regulatory climate. A focus on those fundamental factors would be very useful.
- Recognize the totality of the community and cooperate rather than dictate.
- Whatever the task force recommends, the City must lead by example. Green building is a good example. Recognize the cost consequences of that decision.
- Consider the cost of sustainability and get a better sense of what that means to a small business. Small businesses have difficulty planning 50 years out and it was easier to consider shorter term paybacks benefits. Those investments without cost recovery in a lifetime were difficult for small businesses to make.

Mr. Doppelt asked for thoughts on how the costs of moving toward sustainable business practices could be mitigated for small businesses.

- Consider what you encourage from a true-cost standpoint, for example, LEED-certified versus LEED-type.
- I am pleased to see social benefit listed as our organization deals with the working poor and they need more and better jobs. I do not want to see a no-growth initiative. I see people working hard everyday with little opportunity.
- Incentives are for going the extra distance and there are not many. Businesses need such ongoing incentives. Stormwater is a good example—if well-managed on-site, there should be a reward for that.

- The task force could put its weight toward moving the community in the right direction, such as supporting affordable housing near Mac Court. That could go a long way toward solving other economic problems.
- I am a member of the Eugene 4J School Board and the district has experienced declining enrollment and the number of children has dropped from 18,000 to 15,000. People cannot afford to live here because of the high costs of houses. I worry my children will not be able to afford a house in Eugene. I worry about where the people who work for the district will live, and the impact on their lives from long commutes to satellite communities. If consumers are leaving the core of the community, it adds costs to businesses through greater distribution costs. The City needs to figure out a way to keep people and their families in the community, because they are a renewable resource.

Mr. Doppelt asked if there was a role for the chamber to play in regard to business education and assistance.

- That's where the chamber's focus should be. If a business is not profitable, it is not sustainable. I don't see much here that focuses on that. The chamber can give the task force input and feedback on a plan for a viable economy.
- It would be helpful to have a list of businesses in the area and what they do in the area of sustainability to see what the base is and what other opportunities might exist.
- The chamber operates 20 to 40 programs annually to assist businesses and publishes a magazine that goes to 4,000 subscribers. The chamber could help partner in sharing the message.
- There is a lot of basic business assistance locally. Many business owners want to do more but want to ensure the basics are in place so they feed their families. It would be useful to identify those low-cost practices that businesses could consider implementing.
- Perhaps the City and chamber could work together to seek grant funding for education.
- The City should consider how its actions potentially affect and destroy businesses due to the length of time processes take.

Mr. Doppelt reviewed next steps in the SBI, noting the upcoming Town Hall meetings occurring in December and January and the upcoming roundtables. He also called attention to an online survey at ri.uoregon.edu and asked chamber members to complete the survey. He said that a draft set of task force recommendations would be prepared by late Spring 2006, and the task force would solicit the chamber's comments on the recommendations.

Mr. Funk thanked the chamber for meeting with the task force.

The meeting of the task force adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

(Recorded by Kimberly Young)