

**Policy Paper**

**Sustainable Planning and Development:  
Opportunities for the Philadelphia City Planning  
Commission and Office of Strategic Planning**

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Prepared by:



**and Office of Strategic Planning**

## Introduction

The term “sustainability” has come into common usage as a principle for guiding public and private actions that affect current and future environmental, economic, and social conditions. Frequent headlines on global warming, high energy prices, loss of natural resources, sprawl development, stubbornly high levels of poverty, and other inter-related concerns, remind us of the need for such guidance.

This policy paper is the product of a collaborative effort by staff of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and Office of Strategic Planning—the PCPC/OSP Sustainability Working Group<sup>1</sup>. It is designed to (1) identify current relevant sustainability issues and initiatives, (2) establish a framework for continued and potential PCPC/OSP involvement, and (3) recommend actions for PCPC/OSP concerning best practices of sustainable planning and development.

Our effort recognizes that PCPC and OSP are only two entities concerned with sustainability in our city, region, and state, and that sustainability actions need to be collaborative to be most successful.

This policy paper is organized to summarize the broad practices of sustainable planning and development, and then narrow the focus to those most applicable to PCPC/OSP, in the following three sections:

- 1. Framework for Sustainable Planning and Development**
- 2. Review of Existing Initiatives**
- 3. Recommended Actions**

*The Sustainability Working Group urges that PCPC/OSP leadership consider this policy paper, formally accept its findings and recommendations, and follow through on the recommended actions. In so doing, PCPC/OSP will further support a range of worthy, existing initiatives led by other organizations, improve upon PCPC/OSP’s own efforts, and identify needs to be addressed by new initiatives.*

# 1. Framework for Sustainable Planning and Development

After reviewing definitions adopted in recent years by other organizations<sup>2</sup>, PCPC/OSP offers the following as a working description of sustainable planning and development for Philadelphia:

*Strategic use of city and regional environmental, economic, and social resources to plan and accommodate healthy and equitable development without compromising natural systems and the needs of future generations.*

PCPC/OSP research<sup>3</sup> indicates that ongoing sustainability initiatives generally fall into three inter-related categories:

- Environmental Protection and Stewardship
- Economic and Fiscal Vitality
- Social and Intergenerational Equity

These three categories form a broad framework for actions designed to balance the current and future needs of natural and human systems. However, to guide actions specifically tailored to mature metropolitan cities and regions – areas like Philadelphia whose core cities developed substantially prior to World War II – many organizations are devising sustainability frameworks that reflect the challenges and opportunities of older communities<sup>4</sup>.

- Challenges
  - Decentralization of population and employment
  - Concentrations of poverty and social needs
  - Disinvestment in older buildings, neighborhoods, and infrastructure
  - Loss of agricultural lands, forests, and other natural lands
- Opportunities
  - Densely developed locations with potential for efficient service delivery
  - Broad, regional demand for workers, goods, and services
  - Existing communities, institutions, and landmarks that offer "sense of place"
  - Improved tools for the reuse of formerly vacant urban land

Supporting the development of sustainability frameworks for mature urban areas is a growing body of research and practice in the identification and measurement of relevant criteria and variables<sup>5</sup>. The PCPC/OSP sustainability framework, sug-

gested below, could incorporate criteria and variables from this work to provide meaningful guidance for sustainable initiatives in and around Philadelphia.

- Environmental Protection and Stewardship
  - Comply with or exceed US standards for clean air, water, soil, and food.
  - Manage transportation, land-use patterns, and building design and operations to conserve energy and promote renewable energy strategies.
  - Manage transportation, land-use patterns, and building design and operations, to reduce development impacts on air, water, soils, wildlife, and human health.
  - Reduce wastes at their sources and achieve high levels of resource recovery.
  - Preserve and enhance valuable open space and natural, cultural, and historic resources.
  - Educate citizens to make sound choices about activities that affect the environment.
  
- Economic and Fiscal Vitality
  - Place priority on the improvement and maintenance of existing infrastructure.
  - Strengthen research, business, and labor networks to produce globally competitive goods and services.
  - Develop a globally competitive workforce and economically literate population.
  - Accommodate regional growth and change while reinforcing the competitive advantages of central cities and principal towns as “locations of choice”.
  
- Social and Intergenerational Equity
  - Reduce crime and decrease health risks from natural and man-made hazards, especially where risks are disproportionately concentrated in low-income or minority communities.
  - Promote collaboration among different age groups, races, and cultures.
  - Reduce geographic disparities in the costs and quality of public and private goods and services.
  - Educate citizens to make sound choices about their own health and the health of their communities.

## 2. Review of Existing Initiatives

The framework suggested above provides a foundation to review the extent to which current Philadelphia-area planning and development activities support sustainability-related priorities and outcomes. Relevant activities include public and private initiatives at the City, regional, and Commonwealth levels, and can be considered as either *broad-based* or *focused* areas of effort.

- *Broad-based* existing initiatives are signature policy and program innovations developed by current administrations. These initiatives tend to be comprehensive, adopted through a collaborative process, and backed by stated goals, dedicated resources, and timelines:
  - City - Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (NTI)
  - City - Economic Development Blueprint (EDB)
  - Region – The Year 2030 Plan for the Delaware Valley (DVRPC)
  - Commonwealth – Plan for A New PA: Action Plan Resulting from the 2003 Conference on Transportation and Land Use for Economic Development
  
- *Focused* existing initiatives include a wide range of City activities that are ongoing and very relevant to sustainability, but are less comprehensive in scope, adopted to guide efforts of stakeholders within a discrete range of activity, and often governed by narrow statutory and programmatic goals and funding. City activities in this group include:
  - Sustainable Energy Management Plan
  - US Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement
  - Open-Space Planning
  - Truck Anti-idling Enforcement
  - New Stormwater Ordinance and Regulations
  - High-Efficiency Building Renovation Guidelines
  - Fleet Reduction—Philly Car Share
  - Responsible Tax Reform
  - Recycle Bank
  - Youth-Violence Reduction Program
  - Fun, Fit, and Free

The following pages briefly review each of the selected broad-based existing initiatives as well as a composite of focused existing initiatives. Each review identifies the main strategies or topics, highlights sustainability-related priorities and outcomes, and notes current and potential issues and activities that are relevant to PCPC/OSP.

## **Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (NTI)**

### **Main Strategies**

- Make neighborhoods cleaner and safer.
- Invest in communities.
- Transform the business of government.

### **Sustainability-Related Priorities and Outcomes**

#### Environmental Protection and Stewardship

- Elimination and prevention of blight, preservation and building of vibrant neighborhoods, and “Green Philadelphia” programs. These may help support sustainable land-use patterns by reinforcing existing urban communities, using existing infrastructure efficiently, mitigating environmental impacts of density, and better enabling the City to help reduce development pressure on suburban ‘greenfields’.

#### Economic and Fiscal Vitality

- Streamlined and strengthened government services. This can make the City more attractive for high-quality, tax-generating development.
- Encouragement of investment in existing neighborhoods makes efficient use of existing infrastructure.

#### Social and Intergenerational Equity

- Improvements in neighborhood conditions and services. This helps to maintain the competitiveness of urban communities and retain or attract households who are able to support future investment and service needs.
- Community participation in planning. This helps create an informed citizenry and encourage community input.
- Sensitivity to preservation and enhancement of natural and historic resources. This helps maintain assets for future citizens.

#### Overall

*NTI represents a large-scale, timely, and focused City effort that promotes sustainability by strengthening the competitive advantages of the urban core. Going forward, sustainability principles could be more explicitly incorporated into NTI implementation efforts that affect land use, transportation, energy, and the environment.*

### **Issues and Activities Relevant to PCPC/OSP**

#### Current

Policy collaboration, blight certification and area plans, community planning, neighborhood standards, design guidelines, capital programming, zoning remapping, subdivision, environmental review, update of zoning codes.

#### Potential

Incorporate appropriate sustainability criteria into current NTI activities as well as future planning tasks involving urban design, land use, transportation, community facilities and services, energy efficiency, pollution prevention and management.

## **Economic Development Blueprint (EDB)**

### **Main Strategies**

- Expand the knowledge industry.
- Support civic and cultural development.
- Make Philadelphia a national model for MBE/WBE.
- Continue the development of the waterfront.
- Sustain advances in neighborhood economic development.
- Make incentive programs predictable, objective, and equitable.
- Continue business attraction and expansion efforts.
- Reduce business costs and barriers.
- Increase educational opportunity and literacy services.
- Maintain fiscal responsibility.

### **Review of Sustainability-Related Priorities and Outcomes**

#### Environmental Protection and Stewardship

- Philadelphia as a “location of choice” for the retention and attraction of individuals and businesses. Several strategies and tactics recognize that an improving economy and quality of life make the City more marketable and may reduce development pressure on suburban “greenfields”.

#### Economic and Fiscal Vitality

- Prudent fiscal policy and strategic reinvestment in the City’s businesses, employment centers, attractions, infrastructure, and people.
- Greater utilization of City infrastructure and reuse of “brownfield” sites. This reduces the need to develop new suburban facilities. A strong central city can better meet its own needs while contributing to the overall competitiveness of the region.

#### Social and Intergenerational Equity

- Improved educational outcomes, transparent development financing, increased economic participation by minority and women-owned enterprises, improved commercial services and employment opportunities in neighborhoods, redeveloped brownfields, and preserved historic assets.

#### Overall

*Making the City a location of choice generally promotes sustainability by reinforcing the competitive advantages of the urban core. More explicit EDB attention on environmental and regulatory trade-offs would improve implementation efforts that affect land use, transportation, energy, the environment, and overall quality of life.*

### **Issues and Activities Relevant to PCPC/OSP**

#### Current

Policy collaboration, New River City, gaming, Benjamin Franklin Parkway, special area studies, design guidelines, capital programming, infrastructure planning, community planning, zoning updates/remapping.

#### Potential

Incorporate appropriate sustainability criteria into current EDB activities as well as future citywide and neighborhood tasks involving urban design, land use, transportation, community facilities and services, program evaluation, energy efficiency, and pollution management.

## **The Year 2030 Plan for The Delaware Valley (DVRPC)**

### **Main Strategies**

- Minimize regional sprawl.
- Revitalize urban centers, boroughs, and older suburbs.
- Protect natural resources and reduce development in rural and agricultural areas.
- Create competitive regional economic advantage, with jobs proximate to the labor force.
- Provide transportation facilities sufficient to meet needs and consistent with sound growth management.
- Promote efficient operation of multi-modal transportation system.
- Ensure adequate funding for transportation infrastructure in designated corridors and centers.
- Remove barriers to affordable housing, equitable quality of education, and accessible jobs.

### **Review of Sustainability-Related Priorities and Outcomes**

#### Environmental Protection and Stewardship

- Environmental objectives integrated into local and regional land use and transportation strategies, with emphasis on reinvestment in urban areas. This helps to reduce the loss of rural and agricultural lands. High-quality site and building design, and a multi-modal transportation system.

#### Economic and Fiscal Vitality

- Strong regional economy, consistent with efforts to locate new growth and development within existing communities and defined transportation corridors. Educated labor force, favorable business climate, and high quality of life create a competitive regional advantage with new jobs created in proximity to the needed labor force.

#### Social and Intergenerational Equity

- Ample transportation options, the revitalization of distressed neighborhoods and institutions, and the wider regional distribution of affordable housing. These would help to remove barriers to opportunity. Community well being through safety, arts and culture, historic resources, local services, and a mix of younger and older generations.

#### Overall

*The Year 2030 Plan sets a policy and funding framework that local, regional, and state-wide decision makers can use as a guide to sustainable land-use and transportation decisions.*

### **Issues and Activities Relevant to PCPC/OSP**

#### Current

Represent the Mayor and City of Philadelphia on DVRPC Board and numerous standing committees. Collaborate on technical reviews, community planning, and policy and funding recommendations. Receive funding from transportation grants.

#### Potential

Integrate DVRPC land use and transportation goals and sustainability indicators into the City's planning and evaluation of development strategies and alternatives. Ensure that DVRPC funding and policy decisions support sustainable patterns of development.

**Plan for a New PA: Action Plan Resulting from the 2003 Conference on Transportation and Land Use for Economic Development**

**Main Strategies (selected)**

- 1.3 Develop criteria to address sustainable development, conservation, and land use objectives for approval of community/economic development projects.
- 2.1 Require that sound land use planning principles be a component of spending transportation funds for economic development projects.
- 2.2 Focus Commonwealth programs that support municipal land use planning to achieve the Commonwealth's sustainable development goal.
- 3.1 Establish policies, programs, and incentives to strengthen cities & urban centers.
- 3.2 Provide incentives to municipalities to develop plans, ordinances, and projects that are consistent with the Commonwealth's land use policies and objectives.

**Review of Sustainability-Related Priorities and Outcomes**

Environmental Protection and Stewardship

- Statewide policy and funding coordination on land use decisions that affect the environment.

Economic and Fiscal Vitality

- Economic development compatible with environmental quality and strong cities and towns.
- Economic development incentives, transportation investments, and regulatory decisions weighted toward investments in areas that meet criteria for sound land use.

Social and Intergenerational Equity

- Equitable school funding and performance, regional and statewide tax reform, reinvestment in cities and towns, and environmental programs. These efforts are intended to improve conditions for the populations of underserved and distressed communities.

Overall

*Emerging Commonwealth policies and initiatives are establishing a progressive agenda for sustainable development and backing the agenda with funding and sensitivity to regional needs.*

**Issues and Activities Relevant to PCPC/OSP**

Current

Working relationships with Commonwealth departments and staff, and other City departments that work with Commonwealth agencies, on discrete programs and funding sources.

Potential

Ensure that Philadelphia is aware and supportive of integrated, Commonwealth sustainability initiatives, and work with Commonwealth to secure full support for future City efforts.

## **Selected Focused Initiatives**

These ongoing areas of City activity are relevant and essential to sustainability, though they consist of individual programs generally adopted to guide efforts within a discrete range of activity and statutory or funding requirements.

### **Main Areas of Activity/Strategies**

- Sustainable Energy Management Plan
- US Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement
- Open-Space Planning
- Truck Anti-idling Enforcement
- New Stormwater Ordinance and Regulations
- High-Efficiency Building Renovation Guidelines
- Fleet Reduction—Philly Car Share
- Responsible Tax Reform
- Recycle Bank
- Youth-Violence Reduction Program
- Fun, Fit, and Free

### **Review of Sustainability-Related Priorities and Outcomes**

#### Environmental Protection and Stewardship

Many discrete initiatives are actively addressing environmental concerns about specific sources of pollution, remediation strategies, and public education. Many of these efforts reflect best practices in collaboration among agencies and communities. Additional collaboration, and integration among efforts, may be possible through the refinement of indicators that measure the impact of human activity on environmental systems.

#### Economic and Fiscal Vitality

Regulatory actions are required for land use entitlements and transportation approvals for economic development projects. Applications for public subsidy for development projects require documentation that projects are consistent with local plans. However, current plans and regulatory criteria reflect sustainability to only a limited degree.

#### Social and Intergenerational Equity

Current and future generations benefit from overall efforts to improve air and water quality, provide open space, and enhance transportation options. Fitness education and law enforcement, targeted to 'at risk' communities, promote social equity. Uncertain funding limits the effectiveness of initiatives directed toward underserved populations.

#### Overall

*Wide range of focused initiatives, when considered in combination, represents a significant municipal effort toward sustainability. Additional coordination, use of improved criteria in decision-making, and predictable funding would add value to current efforts.*

## **Issues and Activities Relevant to PCPC/OSP**

### Current

Play prominent role in City Administration for updates to general policies and for project-specific guidance on transportation, open-space planning, and stormwater management, as examples. Participate in a more limited way in project-specific plans and studies on topics of tax reform and youth-violence reduction, as examples.

Potential

In collaboration with other City, regional, and Commonwealth entities, incorporate appropriate sustainable development principles and criteria in focused initiatives, and ensure coordination between and among broad-based and focused initiatives. Support development and implementation of sustainable development strategies, including especially the SEM strategy to consider an integrated energy, land-use, infrastructure, and transportation plan to manage growth.

### 3. Recommended Actions

To be most effective, local actions promoting sustainable planning and development practices need to happen in a coordinated manner and in the context of regional, national, and global activities. The following recommendations and actions make use of local expertise and momentum, elevate existing activities to a higher level of effectiveness, initiate some exciting new efforts, and leverage resources available at a broader scale:

**Recommendation: Continue and expand collaboration with other agencies and organizations to exchange information and promote sustainability practices.**

- Action: Continue current PCPC/OSP involvement and follow through on potential issues and actions identified in this policy paper concerning PCPC/OSP in the following broad-based existing initiatives: Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, Economic Development Blueprint, Year 2030 Plan for the Delaware Valley, and Plan for a New PA.
- Action: Continue current PCPC/OSP involvement and follow through on potential issues and actions identified in this policy paper concerning focused existing areas of activity, such as: Sustainable Energy Management Plan; US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement; Open-space Planning; Truck Anti-idling Enforcement; New Stormwater Ordinance and Regulations; High-Efficiency Building Renovation Guidelines; Fleet Reduction—Philly Car Share; Responsible Tax Reform; Recycle Banks; Youth-Violence Reduction Program; and Fun, Fit, and Free.
- Action: Work with the Capital Program Office and Municipal Energy Office to further develop guidelines for capital planning decision-making such as further promoting High-Efficiency Building Renovation Guidelines during annual capital program process.
- Action: Partner with the Delaware Valley Green Building Council to further develop and refine “rating system” for LEED-Neighborhood Design and use those standards as part of community-planning and other staff activities. Currently the rating system is in preliminary draft form and opportunity exists for “pilot” participation in the next year.

**Recommendation: Establish sustainable planning and development practices as an essential key principle informing the work and mission of PCPC/OSP.**

- Action: Seek endorsement by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission of establishing sustainable planning and development practices as an essential key principle informing the work and mission of PCPC/OSP.
- Action: Institute a method for guiding staff's and Commissioners' review of how well development projects meet stated objectives of sustainable planning and development practices.
- Action: As part of the annual work-plan process, charge division directors with incorporating sustainability objectives into proposed early-action projects (less than two years) and longer-term (greater than two years) implementation.
- Action: Incorporate sound sustainability objectives into the agency's "check list" approach to the review of development projects, including especially objectives that encourage better integration of land use, transportation, energy use, and the environment.

**Recommendation: Communicate that PCPC/OSP has made sustainable planning and development practices a key principle, as part of a broader effort of the City of Philadelphia.**

- Action: Prepare and distribute a press release announcing the importance that PCPC/OSP attaches to sustainable planning and development practices, and its intent to coordinate with other City, regional and Commonwealth organizations.
- Action: Develop a "popular" version of this policy paper (e.g., brochure, poster, handbook, etc.), as an educational piece targeted to a broader audience.
- Action: Make reference to PCPC/OSP's definition of sustainable planning and development practices in appropriate PCPC/OSP publications, website, correspondence, etc.
- Action: Assign staff to write articles and opinion pieces for professional publications, organizations' websites, promoting sustainable planning and development practices and the focus of PCPC/OSP and the City.
- Action: Assign staff to be active participants in regional organizations (e.g., DVGBC) and attend conferences, serving as panelists, presenters, etc.
- Action: Work with APA 2007 Conference planning committee to help focus at least one component of the national 2007 conference on the issue of sustainability activities in Philadelphia and the region.

## **Recommendation: Continue to elevate the issue of sustainable planning and development practices within City government.**

- Action: Follow through on City of Philadelphia commitments made in the US Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement (2005), to strive to meet or exceed Kyoto Protocol<sup>6</sup> targets for reducing global warming pollution by taking actions in our own operations and communities.
- Action: As a city, increase involvement in Commonwealth, national and global initiatives such as ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability or United Nations Urban Environmental Accords.
- Action: In partnership with other City agencies (e.g., Municipal Energy Office, Managing Directors Office, etc.), work with Philadelphia City Council to strengthen City support for a range of sustainability activities that City government engages in as part of its mission (capital planning and programming, fleet management, facility and infrastructure management and development, etc.).
- Action: Support the work of other appropriate organizations to include informed discussion of sustainability as a key issue in future elections.
- Action: Work to make “Sustainability” a high-priority theme of City government like “New River City” or “Neighborhood Transformation.”

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### **END NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Members of the PCPC/OSP Sustainability Working Group

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of *sustainability* is widespread in the field of planning and development. It shares many ideas in common with other current ‘movements’ such as *smart growth*, *livable communities*, *new urbanism*, and *green building*. A sample of descriptions of sustainability includes:

*Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development. <<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/>>

*Sustainability has many definitions but the basic principles and concepts remain constant: balancing a growing economy, protection for the environment, and social responsibility, so they together lead to an improved quality of life for ourselves and future generations.*

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US Environmental Protection Agency <<http://www.epa.gov/sustainability/basicinfo.htm>>

*Planning and development consistent with:*

- *Communities that are good places to live, and that offer economic and other opportunities to their inhabitants*
- *The values of our society - things like liberty and democracy*
- *The biodiversity of the natural environment, both for the contribution it makes to the quality of human life and for its own inherent value*
- *The ability of natural systems to provide the life-supporting "services" that are rarely counted by economists, but which have recently been estimated to be worth nearly as much as total gross human economic product.*

American Planning Association. Policy Guide on Planning for Sustainability  
<<http://www.planning.org/policyguides/sustainability.htm>>

*Sustainability means making decisions, both as individuals and as a society, that seek to maintain or enhance economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting and restoring the natural environment upon which people and economies depend, so that they will be available to future generations.*

The State of the Commonwealth. Is Pennsylvania Moving Towards a Sustainable Future?  
Report to the PA Dept. of Environmental Protection by PA CIEP.  
<<http://www.paconsortium.state.pa.us/StateoftheCommonwealth.pdf>>

<sup>3</sup> PCPC reviewed material on sustainability from academic, industry, and government sources.

<sup>4</sup> Sustainability frameworks for older communities are often "in-progress" collaborations between government, non-profits, and business. Three prominent city/regional examples include:

#### Chicago

City Department of Planning and Development and City Department of Environment – Sustainability is integrated into both Departments' missions and projects.

<http://egov.cityofchicago.org>

A 'Chicago Sustainability Action Guide' is maintained by several regional non-profits

<http://www.believechicago.org/index.php>

Thirty businesses helped the City present a major 2005 conference on 'greening the heartland'.

[http://www.greeningtheheartland.org/current\\_sponsors.html](http://www.greeningtheheartland.org/current_sponsors.html)

#### Boston

Boston Redevelopment Authority, Boston Environment Department, and Mayor's Office spearhead the City's 'green building task force' <http://www.bostongreenbuilding.org/>

The Green Roundtable, a membership group, works on advocacy and education with a broad range of public and private organizations. <http://www.greenroundtable.org/>

The Boston Foundation, in cooperation with the City, produced a series of city and regional assessments that included indicators of sustainability. <http://www.tbf.org/indicators/>

#### Seattle

The City of Seattle recently updated its citywide comprehensive plan, *Toward a Sustainable Seattle*. [http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/dpd/Planning/seattle's\\_comprehensive\\_plan/index.asp](http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/dpd/Planning/seattle's_comprehensive_plan/index.asp)

The non-profit group Sustainable Seattle raises awareness, aids assessment, and fosters action on sustainability in the city and region. <http://www.sustainableseattle.org/>

The Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce sponsors a program called Resource Venture to help Seattle businesses improve their environmental performance and bottom line

<http://www.resourceventure.org/rv/issues/index.php>

<sup>5</sup> The diversity of effort on the development of criteria and indicators is evident from such sites as [http://www.google.com/Top/Science/Environment/Sustainability/Community\\_Sustainability/](http://www.google.com/Top/Science/Environment/Sustainability/Community_Sustainability/) and <http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=643>

<sup>6</sup> The agreement is available at the following US Conference of Mayors website:  
[http://usmayors.org/uscm/resolutions/73rd\\_conference/env\\_04.asp](http://usmayors.org/uscm/resolutions/73rd_conference/env_04.asp)