



SOCIAL EQUITY

**“Where there is injustice for one, there is injustice for all.”
Martin Luther King**

Introduction:

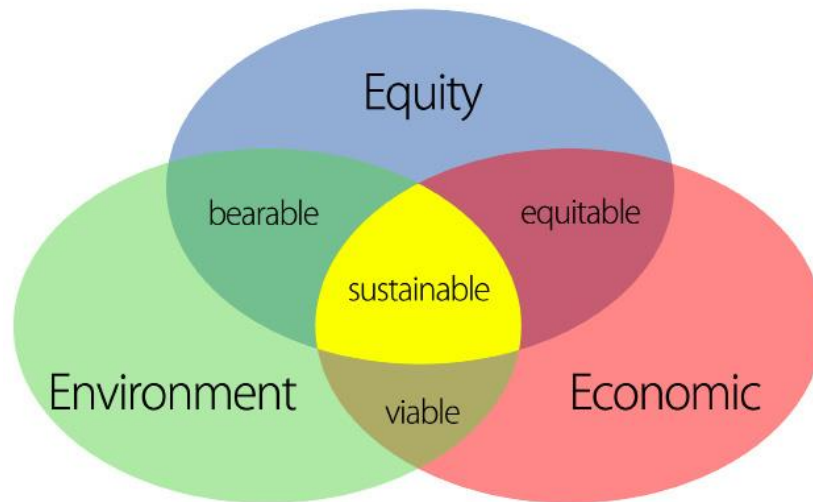
Any comprehensive discussion of sustainability must include social equity as a component equal in merit to the environmental and economic aspects of sustainability. The initial structure of the Green 13 report and its sub-teams did not include a social equity section. This structure was modeled upon sustainability plans borne out of the climate change debates of the 1990's. Fortunately, some communities that are years ahead in sustainability planning have since revised their initial plans to include societal components. Some are designed specifically to engage all citizens in the processes of governance while others focus on how to equitably meet the basic needs of all people. This section seeks to address both of these areas.

Undeniably, the need is great.

- A market study conducted by G2G Research for the Pulaski Pike Market, a proposed example of green job creation within the local food system, found that within approximately a half mile of the Market's site in downtown Huntsville, the median household income in 2007 was \$13,500 - during this same period the median household income for Huntsville at large was almost \$65,000.
- According to the study conducted by Community Development in 2007 the zip code 35816 that encompasses the neighborhood near the Pulaski Pike Market (Terry Heights/Hillandale) reported a 13% unemployment rate compared with Huntsville's average that was under 3%.

In Huntsville, it has been the faith-based organizations and non-profits in conjunction with the newly created Mayor's Office of Multicultural Affairs and Neighborhood Services, and the Human Relations Commission that have heightened emphasis on social equity since 2007. It is, however, the city's Community Development department that provides most of the service to low-income and underserved neighborhoods.

The recommendations in this section are drawn from the preliminary research and programming underway in this nascent sector of Huntsville's social sustainability effort. In all cases, the recommendations are designed to encourage community support and resources in these areas and to open dialogue about related topics and historical influences that can be hard to address collectively and individually. However, recent research shows that any successful attempt to improve distressed communities, reduce poverty and promote equality is more likely to succeed using culture, social class, and structural community-building frameworks for its collaborative efforts. More on this later.....



Source: USEPA Publication EPA-902-K-08-001 November 2008. Planning for a Sustainable Future: A Guide for Local Governments

What is Social Equity?

Social Equity is usually defined by the contexts in which it's used. In terms of conservation, "Social Equity implies fair access to livelihood, education, and resources; full participation in the political and cultural life of a community." The National Academy of Public Administration defines it as "The fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; the fair, just and equitable distribution of public services and implementation of public policy; and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy."

Boulder's Social Sustainability plan states that "social equity is defined as participatory governance; deliberate and inclusionary processes; considering the needs of all members of the community, including those most vulnerable. Social equity means strengthening the representation of all people in the decision making process. The greater the participation in the governance process, the more well-informed policy decisions are and the better long term outcomes for meeting all of the goals of the city." (2007, 10)

A cornerstone of sustainability is social equity in the division of limited resources. The city has limited resources to accomplish the tasks of government. The entire community must be engaged to decide how resources should be allocated. While the city uses many tools to determine if there is any inequity in planned projects, ultimately the impacted communities are in the best position to help city officials locate inequities.

Social equity does not mean that a neighborhood will not be impacted negatively by change or the problems with the delivery of services. It means that any negative impact will be reasonably assessed and will be balanced. Social equity means that each neighborhood in the city will be engaged and involved in the entire process and that the outcomes will reflect the social values of the entire city. Engagement helps to overcome barriers that may prevent individuals or communities from participating in projects that impact them (2007,11). Therefore, we are making the following recommendations to encourage greater social equity as the city of Huntsville develops and executes its sustainability model.

Recommendation 1. Promote social justice and racial equity for all people in civic decision-making without regard to race, culture or class – especially as it relates to sustainability planning.

Potential Action 1: Build capacity to strengthen harmonious relations among diverse religious, racial, class and cultural groups through continued program investments that leverage existing and future support.

Benefits

- Enhances support for constructing a social equity strategic plan
- Encourages civic participation in decision-making, a process already underway via the Office of Minority Affairs and Neighborhood Services
- Leverages the commitment and efforts of the Interfaith Mission Service (IMS) to provide leadership on this issue via its Racial Harmony Coalition

How?

- Work through the Racial Harmony Coalition, the Office of Multicultural Affairs and

Neighborhood Services and the Human Relations Commission to create a strategic plan for addressing the disparities in race and socio-economic class as a function of sustainability planning

- Use metrics on income, education, health, housing, and criminal justice disparity data gathered and reported in August 2009 by the Racial Harmony Coalition as benchmarks for social equity and sustainability planning.
- Provide tools and leadership training to support a common knowledge base and best practices from other programs, i.e. Everyday Democracy and the Community Builder's Toolkit from the Institute of Democratic Renewal/Project Change
- Work in partnership with United Way to address findings of the 2009 United Way Needs Assessment with respect to affordable housing and employment challenges for low-income households and residents with low educational attainment.

Potential Action 2: Encourage and increase civic participation of all residents in matters related to sustainability and municipal governance

Benefits

- Underserved groups will have a voice and become participants in the decisions that affect their lives
- Residents will be empowered to influence positive change

How?

- Increase resources to engage the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Neighborhood Services
- Mobilize voter registration groups and community volunteers to assist and encourage citizen involvement, i.e. NAACP chapters, fraternities and sororities, faith-based communities
- Increase attendance at city-sponsored community-level events and neighborhood meetings focused on sustainability planning

Potential Action 3: Strengthen collaboration with faith-based community leaders to address sustainability, social justice and its goal of eliminating all forms of oppression and inequality

Benefits

- Inclusion of the faith community in sustainability planning and leveraging processes already underway in which city has been engaged
- Reaches the cross-section of thousands of Huntsvillians of various faiths who attend churches, mosques, synagogues and temples pastored by these leaders.

How?

- Work with Greater Huntsville Interdenominational Ministerial Fellowship, the Southeast Congregational Cluster and IMS to expand its racial harmony dialogue and sustainability focus

- Encourage COH staff and council members to host and attend leadership workshops and round tables at faith-based venues.
- Work through the Human Relations Commission and the Racial Harmony Coalition for creating this dialogue.
- Engage community leaders and representatives from local governing bodies to participate in these discussions
- Use 2004 Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change publication entitled “Structural Racism and Community Building” and other tools mentioned for this process

RECOMMENDATION 2. Agree to focus on “Quality of Life” aspects of social equity as a function of sustainability planning in municipal governance

Potential Action 1: Increase collaboration with area non-profits and other government agencies to reduce homelessness and increase access to food, affordable housing, equitable health care, education and living wage employment.

Benefits

- Alleviates the devastating effects of poverty and discrimination for individuals and families in Huntsville
- All community members are able to meet their basic human needs including access to food, job, affordable housing, equitable health care and education
- Establishes a concerted effort by the city to address this critical issue

How?

- Appoint service providers, academicians, key stakeholders to a city Task Force on Meeting Basic Human Needs as an outreach effort of the Human Relations Commission
- Convene town hall meetings to allow residents to voice their concerns and suggestions
- Combine recommendations from state agencies and key sources , i.e. the Alabama Commission on Poverty, ARISE, Alabama Poverty Project, etc.
- Incorporate all viable recommendations into the city's Community Development Consolidated Plan
- Ensure funding and program investments in the capacity of entities in fulfilling this action.

Potential Action 2: Raise community-wide awareness of the need, advocate for, and seek ways to increase equity in the median household income levels between black and whites in Huntsville.

Benefits

- Improved quality of life for all residents
- Elimination of income disparities in Huntsville

How?

- Elicit support of the local chambers of commerce, the State Employment Service, and other entities to provide or encourage wider opportunities for upward mobility
- Widely publicize contract opportunities for small business development and self-employment
- Enhance professional and on-the-job training opportunities in local businesses
- Support living wage initiatives at the local, state and national levels
- Engage in green jobs creation programs where possible

Potential Action 3: Foster community-wide collaboration to support state and local educational entities to increase equity in K-12 educational proficiency and adult literacy rates

Benefits

- Reduction in achievement gaps among elementary students
- Increase in high school graduation rates
- Increase in literacy among the adult population in Huntsville

How?

- Support innovations in public education proposed by the U.S. Dept. of Education
- Work with Huntsville City, Madison County Schools and the 2 Year College System to incorporate specific sustainability objectives in its educational process
- Support creation of adult literacy initiatives and programs that could address reducing the estimated 4,700 adults living in Huntsville who read below a 9th grade level

Potential Action 4: Advocate for streamlining institutional policies and administrative practices that reduce the over-representation of minority youth and adults in the criminal justice system

Benefits

- Reduces disparities based on race, unfair treatment and enforcement bias

- Provides the community with a broader, deeper base of talented individuals
- Encourages more young people and families to invest in their own personal growth and development

How?

- Human Relations Commission to work with law enforcement agencies to assess current status
- Establish new targets for reducing disparities, unfair treatment and enforcement bias
- Strengthen existing volunteer programs at high-risk schools

Recommendation 3: Establish Social Equity as a structural norm and cornerstone to sustainability in the municipal governance process

Potential Action 1: Diversify the COH’s workforce to reflect the demographics of the community at large

Benefits

- Extends current efforts of the Office of Multicultural Affairs to diversify city boards and committees
- Helps the Human Relations Commission to achieve a significant social equity goal

How?

- Work with the Equal Employment Opportunity Office and Human Resources to assess current status
- Establish new workforce targets, plan of action and timeline formulated and monitored by the Human Relations Commission

Potential Action 2: Act upon the resolution signed in fall 2009 establishing a policy on Community Inclusiveness and a partnership with the League of Cities

Benefits

- Reaffirms the city’s intent to join the League of Cities’ Inclusive Community Partnership
- Seeks to move Huntsville toward its goal to attain “One City: One Vision”

How?

- Use the tools and resources available from the partnership to engage the community and its elected officials

Potential Action 3: Create a social sustainability plan - in the absence of a unified comprehensive plan that embraces sustainability - or create a social equity component to a citywide sustainability plan

Benefits

- supports equitable distribution of resources
- supports diversity within the community
- meets the basic needs of all residents, and

- invests in social and human capital that supports economic vitality and environmental goals

How?

- Establish a policy on community social sustainability through a City Resolution
- Articulate the principles of community, environmental, economic, and social sustainability in comprehensive plan elements, and
- Inject the sustainability strategic plan into city council and staff actions, decisions, regulations, master plans, policies, programs, language and culture
- Incorporate the use of a Social Impact Assessment tool likened to the City of Boulder, Colorado to aid the council and staff in assessment of social impacts from impending city processes and policies

Potential Action 4: Raise public awareness of the city's work to monitor and promote social equity issues

Benefits

- Informs citizenry of efforts already underway
- Reaffirms city's desire for inclusiveness to under-represented and minorities, thereby encouraging increased participation.
- Signals to others the city's dedication to this mission

How?

- Include social equity indicators and benchmark data on sustainability report card and city's sustainability section of its website
- Take definitive steps to continue expanding resources and support for existing programs and promoting new ones
- Highlight work of the Human Relations Commission, Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Community Development Department
- Contact local media, websites, organizations, etc. with minority audiences and constituencies; give interviews, presentations, etc.
- Link efforts to faith-based initiatives and interdenominational dialogue currently being constructed across the community

RECOMMENDATION 4. Empower existing departments to address social equity collectively in order to meet the needs of a sustainable city and to engage the broader community in the social sustainability initiative.

Potential Action 1: Establish opportunities for joint collaboration among key municipal departments and its community non-profit partners to collectively address social equity issues

Benefits

- Cooperative planning in pursuit of funding to meet community needs, i.e. for improved housing, green jobs and other social equity projects..
- Integrates housing, transportation and livable communities policies for low income sectors of the city
- Integrates work of Multicultural Affairs and Community Development

How?

- Monthly collaborative meetings convened by the Human Relations Commission
- Engage Community Development and its area non-profit partners in dialogue and training in social equity issues
- Seek outlets with Community Development's non-profit and leadership organization partners to engage in the use of resources like the Community Builders Tool Kits and those available from the Inclusive Community Partnership
- Pursue planning grant from Sustainable Communities program under development by HUD, DOT and EPA (Partner with Madison City and Redstone Arsenal for these dollars)
- Incorporate sustainable practices in social equity into the HUD Consolidation Plan 2010 – 2015 and the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice currently under development
- Investigate the Public Housing Capitol Fund grants designed for creation of energy efficient communities through substantial rehabilitation or new construction of public housing projects
- Increase funding for programming for underserved community housing, green jobs employment and other related social equity projects
- Report on progress to the community on a regular basis

Potential Action 2: Use the civic engagement structure formed within the Office of Multicultural Affairs to engage local citizens in sustainability and social equity issues

Benefits

- Synergizes office programming with sustainability planning

How?

- Work through the OMCA, its advisory boards, the Neighborhood Council, and the growing number of civic associations forming in previously under-represented neighborhoods to gain input/participation in sustainability planning and projects

