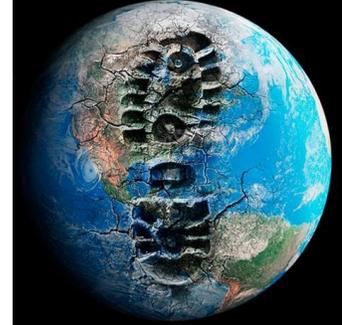


## Lightening Our Footprint: Minnesota GreenStep Cities and the Regional Indicators Project

### Program Notes

Thursday, April 28, 2011 | 4:00 – 5:30 pm  
Dorsey & Whitney | 50 South Sixth Street  
Minnesota Room | Suite 1500 | Minneapolis, MN 55402



**Commissioner Paul Aasen** of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) spoke about the Minnesota GreenStep Cities program as a framework for making sustainable choices in our communities. He began by noting that individuals and businesses stay in Minnesota for three reasons: the educated workforce; access to clean water; and the overall high quality of life.

However, Commissioner Aasen explained that the stress we're creating is growing faster than the population, as evidenced by several indicators: real gross state product, vehicle miles traveled, energy consumption, greenhouse gases, population, etc. These are cultural and social issues.

The Twin Cities region faces the serious issue of being designated an air quality non-attainment zone, covering as much as the 18-county metropolitan area, in the next four to five years. Commissioner Aasen emphasized that the underlying problem of the day is how we harvest and use energy. We need to consider the outcomes and repercussions.

Therefore, in Minnesota we must address our carbon footprint from the broader construct of land use and sustainability because the massive smoke stacks are not the only piece of the problem. Commissioner Aasen's word of the day is 'Hope' because we have the power to tackle these issues by creating a sustainability culture and by bringing people together to accomplish things that benefit future people. The GreenStep Cities program offers best practices tips and other valuable resources for more sustainable practices on its website: <http://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/>.

**Dr. Carissa Schively Slotterback** of the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs discussed the Regional Planning Implementation project. Research conducted through this project looks at models and seeks to develop a best practices framework that will allow for an adaptable model that joins research and practice in relevancy. Through discussion of seven detailed case studies, Dr. Schively Slotterback showed that sustainability can function as a means to reframe collaboration with local governments and stakeholders. It can also provide a regional framework for local implementation.

Dr. Schively Slotterback's word of the day is 'Momentum,' as evidenced by the results of these seven case studies. Denver Regional Council of Governments, for instance, covers a nine-county region ranging from an urban to a rural setting. They have used the concept of 'Sustainability Cafes' to promote regional conversation. In Long Island the focus is on the economy, taxes and governance. They are using working groups to deal with the fragmentation of governance in the diverse region. Chicago has incorporated a focus on natural systems.

Sustainability measurement is another important part of the project. Planning efforts should be monitored through measurable indicators. This strategy will enable us to build knowledge and aggregate multiple data sets. She noted that some cities have developed websites with sustainability measurement indicators. By creating a broad sustainability indicators practice nationally, we can tailor the definition of sustainability to a regional context.

**Rick Carter**, senior vice president of LHB, chose 'Data' as his word of the day to discuss the Regional Indicators Project. The project currently has three participating cities: Falcon Heights, St. Louis Park, and Edina. Carter began his discussion with a question: What are we measuring and how will we know if it has happened? Carter described the scope of the work from establishing the feasibility of the approach to collecting data to evaluating the outcomes of the project. The data collected from the past two years for the participating cities can be measured in units of energy, water, vehicle miles traveled, and waste, all of which can be converted to dollars and CO<sup>2</sup>, as well as normalized to jobs and/or population. Carter covered the detailed data for usage and projections of future usage.

At this stage, the Regional Indicators Project demonstrates that the cities are the ideal scale for measuring our carbon footprint because we can measure community-wide data. There is a correlation, thus far, between the data compiled and the GreenStep cities' chosen best management practices. Energy, as discussed by Commissioner Aasen, has proven to be the largest 'part of the pie,' and commercial/industrial consumption outweighs residential consumption. Carter encourages cities to include these targets in their comprehensive plans and for all Regional Council of Mayors cities to become involved in the project.

**Peter Lindstrom**, mayor of Falcon Heights and vice president of public affairs for the Minnesota High Tech Association (MHTA), described sustainability actions and goals in the city of Falcon Heights and the importance of sustainability to the broader metropolitan region. Mayor Lindstrom read the 2010 report 'Adopting Climate Change in Minnesota' to convey the many real consequences of climate change in our state. Some of these consequences included: More spring flooding; more water-borne diseases; accelerating extinction of plant and animal species; shifting duration of pollen seasons; chemical and biological changes of water; and degradation of water quality. He then asked: Can we afford to not deal with these issues? Sustainability, he stressed, is an economic opportunity for the city of Falcon Heights. As the key driver of fiscal prosperity, we need sustainable growth to move us toward a 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge economy.

Mayor Lindstrom asked, 'Why not Falcon Heights? Why not Minnesota?' He wants to see job creation in Falcon Heights, but more importantly he wants to see job growth in the region because ultimately Falcon Heights (and the whole region) benefits from this growth. He stated that he is happy for his city to be a guinea pig for free sustainability-focused programs, experiments, and data collection, which is evident in the numerous sustainable measures taken in Falcon Heights: the increasing demand for community garden plots; the development of rain water collection parking lots; and the 'Adopt a Crop' program, to name a few. Mayor Lindstrom's word for the program is 'Action' because, as the city of Falcon Heights demonstrates, the positive outcomes of sustainability initiatives far outweigh the negative outcomes.