

OAPA SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES & STRATEGY 4/20/11

Background

Starting with the 2001 COPE Report and over the course of the last 10 years, OAPA has become increasingly active in working to improve the Planning Program in Oregon. We clearly recognize the major accomplishments of the program, and continue to strongly support it. At the same time we know from working within the system that, particularly after 35 years, there are many improvements that could be made. Particularly with the rise of climate change and related energy issues as major concerns both globally and locally, most Oregon planners have an interest in how “sustainability” concepts interact with planning, particularly in the Oregon context.

During the 2009 legislature OAPA strongly supported language to create overarching principles for the Planning Program that acknowledged sustainability issues as something that needed to be clearly addressed. Though such language was passed and added to the founding statute for the program, other new language made the overarching principles unenforceable.

During the 2010 session OAPA supported legislation to begin addressing one of the major sustainability issues, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, through land use and transportation actions at the MPO level. These bills initiated the state’s program, but the 2011 (and future) sessions will need to continue the momentum and create a robust state and regional planning basis for major actions that lead to significant GHG reductions.

Current Policy Initiatives

OAPA is creating a set of interlocking policy recommendations that will articulate our intent to pursue additional changes to the ways in which planning is conducted at the state, regional and local levels. The following is a brief explanation of each of these initiatives.

State

OAPA has entered into a discussion with AIA and ASLA to address what we see as a major missing element of the Oregon planning program – a statewide strategy to ensure that Oregon’s citizens and public officials have a common understanding of where and how we will accommodate population growth over the next 25 – 30 years in a manner compatible with sustainability principles. The three organizations have started a discussion about a state “Livability Strategy”. Initially the group discussed guiding principles grouped in four strategic areas: the overall settlement pattern for the state; major infrastructure needs to handle that pattern of use; quality design elements to enhance Oregon’s quality of life; and maintenance of social equity as these other elements are carried out. These continue to evolve as discussions continue. As this effort progresses the intent is to collaborate with other interested organizations, in coordination with the regional and local initiatives

mentioned below. The ultimate objectives are still under discussion but certainly include eventually working with decision-makers and leaders across the state to implement an Oregon Livability Strategy.

Regional

OAPA has completed a regional planning study for the state with recommendations for creating regional decision-making bodies outside the Portland Metro area. It is clear that regions, centered on cities, are the driving forces economically for the state, and that they each have their own characteristics and issues. The jurisdictions within regions also have important issues in common, most notably an expectation that they need to address GHG emissions, affordable housing and transportation, and economic prosperity. Our recommendations call for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of local decision-making by pooling resources at the regional level, and allowing the regions some measure of implementation flexibility while meeting state designated performance measures tailored for each region. Enhanced regional planning capability is especially critical to effectively carry out the state's GHG reduction strategy. OAPA's recommendations take into account the concerns of most interested parties and attempt to be realistic about funding and timing issues to ensure broad support. The OAPA Board adopted the recommendations Nov. 5, 2010 and since then has been refining and carrying out an implementation strategy in collaboration with other interested organizations.

Local

OAPA is also concerned about the ability of local communities to address the full range of sustainability issues. The best mechanism to ensure that occurs is to firmly embed sustainability principles in comprehensive plans and other city and county plans, codes and programs. Following a half-day session on Sustainability at the OAPA conference in May, 2010, a Board appointed committee took the initiative to define sustainability in the Oregon planning context, and articulate what it means in practical terms. The draft document indicated what the characteristics of "sustaining places" are, actions planners can take to help create, maintain and enhance those places, and strategies that OAPA will support to ensure sustainability is effectively incorporated into Oregon's planning program. After sending out drafts of this document to our membership for review, the Board adopted it as working draft in January, 2011. The Board and its committees will work with this document and continue to refine it over the next year.

Overall Strategy

These policies and strategies provide a blueprint for moving forward with a common OAPA agenda at the state, regional and local levels. These coordinated sustainability initiatives will form the basis for OAPA collaborative actions at many levels over the next few years.