

A Regional Framework for Sustainable Development

Heather Higinbotham

Editor's note: The idea of creating guidelines for sustainable development is not new. Some building codes, for example, do a good job of defining construction methods that will reduce energy consumption. Other independent certifications, such as LEED for Homes or the NAHB Model Green Building Guidelines, strive to incorporate broader concerns such as site selection and sourcing of materials. The broadest view of sustainability, on the level of roads and sewers, is sometimes addressed by community zoning regulations.

But to date, few communities have done an effective job of compiling all these best practices and requirements -- usually separate and often conflicting -- into an integrated whole. So it got our attention when we learned of the Greater Yellowstone Framework for Sustainable Development, a project of the Yellowstone Business Partnership (YBP) in Bozeman, Montana. They have projects in play in over a dozen communities in which the idea of "LEED for Communities" has had some early success. We asked Heather Higinbotham, the Director of Sustainability at YBP and Energy Conservation Technician for the City of Bozeman, to tell us more.

The concept for the Greater Yellowstone Framework for Sustainable Development was born in response to the fact that existing green building rating systems didn't take into account the very resources that make our region so amazing -- from the unsurpassed recreational opportunities to the rich biodiversity to the vibrant communities. In reality, one could build a LEED Platinum certified home smack dab in the middle of a migration corridor, and call it sustainable.

How the Framework Builds Community

The Framework is designed to address some of the ecosystem-scale issues outside of the built environment that are impacted by growth and development. It is an ecosystem rating system modeled on LEED for Neighborhood Development. The Framework incorporates the LEED guidelines for the built-environment, then goes beyond that to include critical categories that aren't normally found in green building rating systems -- attributes such as recreation resources, biodiversity, land use and conservation, cultural and historic values, public service and infrastructure, transportation, and community vitality.

The Greater Yellowstone Framework was initially designed to support private development projects such as subdivisions. Pretty early on we realized that to have any success with the project, we would have to work with local governments. Too often we were running into regulatory structures that not only didn't encourage sustainable development aspects, but strictly prohibited it. Who knew that having a clothesline was such a hot button issue?

So, with the help of planners, developers, elected officials, and other interested stakeholders, we set about crafting the draft regulations for a local government to certify under the Framework. The intent was to create a parallel system to the private development rating system, and to provide a road map for local governments to achieve these goals.

- Remove barriers to achieving GYF credit strategies (enable).
- Implement the GYF credit strategies on all local government funded projects (lead by example).
- Provide incentives (and/or disincentives) to encourage the sustainable activity described in the GYF credit (carrot/stick).
- Adopt the GYF credit strategy as policy for all projects within their jurisdiction, public and private (enforce).

A Measure of Success

The Framework drew the interest of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (EPA, DOT, and HUD), and in 2011 we were invited to join Fremont County, Idaho in applying for a \$1.5M three-year regional planning grant, with the Framework as the guiding document for regional sustainable development. The grant was awarded, and we formed a multi-jurisdiction and multi-agency consortium to complete the grant work. Key deliverables include completing a model code and regional plan for sustainable development for the consortium area.

What is Next

Our regional planning grant wraps up in early 2015, at which point we will look toward implementation and next steps for the Greater Yellowstone Framework, including expansion beyond the consortium area. We've had requests



from areas as far away as Boston for a regionally-relevant way to address development challenges. We anticipate having two joint city/county government certifications soon, and a supporting set of case studies and best practices.



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Find out more:

www.yellowstonebusiness.org/

www.yellowstonebusiness.org/programs/greater-yellowstone-framework-for-sustainable-development/

www.bozemanclimatepartners.net

www.sustainablyyellowstone.org