

Article for November 25, 2009 Evansville Review

Last week I spoke at a meeting of the Janesville Sustainability Committee. A new committee of the city that began meeting in spring of 2008, it consists of eight individuals, including one member of the seven-person Janesville City Council. Along with Larry Arft, City Manager of Beloit, I was invited to speak on local sustainability initiatives in our cities. The Janesville committee is in the process of developing a roadmap for building community awareness, support, and initiatives for sustainability.

Instead of making a formal presentation complete with PowerPoint, I spoke extemporaneously about Evansville's remarkable community-wide endeavors in support of energy efficiency, conservation and renewable resources. I explained that I took cues from these initiatives in recognizing Evansville's interest in sustainability. I distributed copies of the newly-updated Evansville energy initiatives list that now includes 60 items.

I displayed a "show and tell" example of a grassroots collaboration celebrating "green". I explained that intermediate school student Jake Krueger's example of the Discover Youth Arts (DYA) windmill art project began with fabrication of windmill kits by the Woodchucks, construction and decoration of the tabletop windmills by students with tutelage by DYA volunteers, and display of the windmills at a Main Street business during the Harvest Windmill Festival.

I explained the success of our annual energy fairs, reaching 1500-2000 people each year. Both Matt Mills, Chair of the Janesville Sustainability Committee, and the Beloit City Manager have attended the Evansville Energy Fair.

I spoke of Evansville's pilot energy independent community grant to develop a plan to generate/obtain 25% of municipal electricity and 25% of transportation fuels from renewable sources by 2025. I explained the required appointment of an energy independence team and the steps of 1) performing an energy audit of buildings, infrastructure, and vehicles, 2) identifying energy project priorities, and 3) developing model 25x25 plans using the project priorities. Janesville will likely be submitting an application for the second round of 25x25 grants.

The Committee asked me to identify three ideas for growing community support for sustainability. I suggested first identifying champions in the school system—work with students; they will engage their parents. My next idea was to grow business community support and educate them about the economic development impacts for the community. My final suggestion was to obtain local government buy-in.

While Evansville has successfully used a grassroots approach to sustainability activities, Beloit has been successful with a top-down sustainability effort. Arft reported that in December 2007 the Beloit City Council voted to become an eco-municipality. They have incorporated sustainability into the city vision and mission statements. Beloit's Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2008 and includes sustainability principles. All city policies and programs are reviewed for impacts on "the built and natural

environment using the four eco-municipality guidelines". The city includes funding in their capital improvement plan for energy/environmental upgrades.

Beloit recognizes residential and commercial historic preservation activities as sustainable initiatives. Several Beloit businesses are models for sustainable architecture. Beloit Memorial Hospital, ABC Supply Company, and the new Science Center at Beloit College have green roofs. Kettle Foods has received LEED Gold Certification and the Beloit College Science Center has obtained LEED Platinum Certification.

During a meeting break we had a brief general conversation about the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (federal stimulus). Because of population size Janesville and Beloit received entitlement funding through this program. Beloit has received \$157,000 that will be spent to determine the feasibility of utilizing alternative energy sources in City Hall and other public facilities, as well as expand the Hydrogen Fuel Program in the Public Works Department. Janesville was provided grant funding of \$618,000.

As a smaller non-entitlement community, earlier this month Evansville submitted a competitive EECBG application for two projects that totaled \$221,110. No local government match is required for this grant. Approximately 170 Wisconsin communities submitted applications for \$9.5 million in funding. Twenty to forty grants are expected to be awarded early next year.

Our grant request includes a LED street light upgrade for 323 lights. The highly-efficient lighting, purchased from Ruud Lighting of Racine, would reduce energy costs for those fixtures by 55%. At current electrical rates, the city would save approximately \$11,200 annually in the operating budget.

The other project in the grant request is a lighting upgrade to the public works facility. The lighting plan developed by Orion Energy of Manitowoc would reduce annual lighting energy costs for the building from \$4,800 to \$920, a savings of approximately \$3,900 in city operating expense. It includes installation of 20 solar light pipes that are off the electrical grid.

The on-line EECBG application process was a nail-biting experience. There were capacity issues in the system in the final days prior to the grant submission. We were able to successfully log-on at 5:00 a.m. to add final application information prior to submitting the application 24 hours before the grant deadline.

We are hopeful that we will be selected for EECBG funding. The lighting upgrade projects are priorities identified in our 25x25 grant project and will allow us to implement them in the short-term.

I wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving. Enjoy the company of family and friends. Please stay safe.

Energy Saving Tip

Old refrigerators, especially those manufactured prior to 1993, can use up to twice as much electricity as newer models. (Dad, thanks for unplugging that old refrigerator. It gets rid of an energy “hog” and will save you money.)

Community Announcements

As is usual, City Hall will be closed on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, and on Friday, November 27.

The 12th annual AWARE Love Light Tree-Lighting Ceremony will be held on Friday, December 4, at 6:00 p.m. in front of City Hall.

The 26th annual Holiday Craft Fair will be held on Saturday, December 5, in the J.C. McKenna School Gym from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Community Congratulations/Thanks

Congratulations to Shemo Arifi, proprietor of Brown School Café, on the opening of Evansville’s new restaurant.

Evansville thanks the residential Water & Light customers purchasing monthly blocks of clean energy. More than 4% of residences participate in the renewable energy program. WPPI Energy recognized our commitment with a \$500 contribution to the city for purchase of trees.

As we begin the holiday season, thanks are extended to the fire district for chauffeuring Santa and Mrs. Claus and providing youth fire truck rides and the city water and light department for hanging the snowflakes and new banners and stringing lights on the AWARE tree in front of City Hall.

Congratulations to Cheryl Fuchs and Chris Eager for receiving the first Sally Eager Historic Preservation Award for an outstanding effort in restoration of a historic building. The building owners were recognized for restoration of the extensively fire-damaged Campbell building at 16 West Main Street.

Congratulations and thanks to the Primetimer Woodchucks for completion of the pilot mentoring program of middle school students. Ten new students will soon start working with the Woodchucks, developing generational relationships along with woodworking basics. The Channel 3 news story about the Woodchucks (and Woodchick Mary Libby) was terrific!

It was great to begin the week by reading the nice story about the Grove School Community Forest in Monday’s Wisconsin State Journal and the two thumbs up editorial comments in the morning Janesville Gazette about our city administrator and the RUOK

program of our police department. Evansville is a special place; it is good to occasionally receive recognition.