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Planning a Sustainable Future for Dryden

by Kristine Heiney

Dryden, like other towns nationwide, is starting to put together a plan for town sustainability. Katie Stoner, the sustainability planner for the towns of Ithaca and Dryden, is heading the project with help from members of the Dryden community.

During a meeting in November, Stoner gave a presentation on what would be happening to promote sustainability in Dryden. In it, she said, "The purpose of this project is to create a plan and a planning process that will integrate sustainability principles into Town policy and decision-making activities to guide the Town of Dryden towards the measurement and achievement of a sustainable future."

Many different definitions of sustainability have been floating around lately. In their sustainability plan, the town of Dryden is focusing on a definition put forward by Oregon Governor John Kizhaber: "Three overlapping circles: one representing environmental needs, one representing economic needs, and one representing community social needs. The area where the circles overlap is the area of sustainability, the areas of livability - the area where all the threads of quality of life come together. If we are to have it all, we must recognize that these three circles are not separate, unrelated entities." Stoner is drawing up a plan to optimize all three of these circles.

In drawing up a sustainability plan, Stoner is following a standard procedure set up by the Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), an international organization comprised of local governments who are practicing sustainability in their governmental procedures. ICLEI provides a standard way of approaching how to improve sustainability within a community - a set of guidelines that have worked for other local governments.

The first step is getting a snapshot of the community. Stoner's presentation identifies the two purposes of this step: "Identify and create a baseline of sustainability indicators," and "Create a system by which sustainability can be tracked, benchmarked, and recorded." The next step is setting concrete, attainable goals. This step involves integrating suggestions from the whole town into the plan. The final step is drawing up a tactical plan to implement procedures set up to attain the goals.

This procedure is standardized, in a way, across many local governments, but it has enough flexibility that it can be adapted to each individual town and city. In Ithaca, for example, the sustainability plan is largely focused on the environment aspect. In Dryden, the town government has expressed interest in integrating the environmental part into a larger community picture.

Currently, Stoner is four months into her research for understanding Dryden's current standing in each of the three areas of sustainability. Environmental research includes measuring air and water quality, how much open space is in the town, and the level of carbon dioxide emissions. Areas of interest in the economy are employment rates, types of employment, how well local businesses do, and regional employment trends. Community needs include recreational space, education, safety, and access to healthy and affordable food. These factors, among others, make up a snapshot of where Dryden currently stands. While many factors involve quantitative measurements, on the whole Stoner aims to have a qualitative understanding of the town.

Community members are weighing in on what they think sustainability is and what should be done to improve sustainability within Dryden. Stoner says, "All members of the community - whether an individual, a business, an organization, or an institution - can and should play a part in the sustainability planning process. We're depending on you to engage with us as we work toward a prosperous, healthy, and sustainable future for the Town of Dryden." Some community members shared their personal definitions online: "Dryden is a place where people will be thriving and enjoying life and each other's company in peace, health, and plenty," says one. "Living or operating within the means provided with the ability to save for future use," says another.

To read more about Dryden's sustainability plan or submit your own ideas about how to move forward, visit www.dryden.ny.us/environmental-planning/sustainability-planning.

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