

# Using Resident Formulated Multi-Dimensional Indicators to Assess Urban Communities' Progress Toward Meeting Sustainability Goals

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## ABSTRACT

For the past seven years the authors have, in partnership with communities throughout the state of Ohio in the U.S.A., designed and implemented long range urban planning initiatives based on principles of sustainability, linking the social, economic and environmental sectors of community. These programs have all involved inclusionary processes for visioning, goal setting, and long-range plan development in the creation of resident-initiated and supported sustainability goals. For sustainability to be pursued, we have found that a balance among these complex and often competing social, economic and environmental interests in each urban area must be achieved and effective tools must be used to assure that goals remain in balance through continual monitoring and assessment. The assessment technique used is the development of multidimensional indicators which measure how close the community is to reaching its goals and that they remain in balance. We have formulated an approach to the establishment of multi-dimensional indicators that involves both residents and professionals in their development and on-going monitoring. Such stakeholder involvement helps to insure that the indicators will be relevant, politically supportable, usable and that they matter to the community. These qualities maximize their legitimacy in the eyes of local leaders and increase the likelihood of their usage in community decision-making processes.

Our paper will outline the assessment processes that we have developed, their impact on the decision making in urban communities, and how these approaches can be effectively replicated in other communities.

**Key words:** Sustainability, Community Planning, Indicator Development

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable comprehensive planning begins around the practice of citizen participation in a planning process. A critical tenant of sustainability is the application of methods that enhance an *inclusionary* approach. This paper identifies methods to engage citizen leadership and participation within a stakeholder framework to develop indicators to measure the successful implementation of a sustainable plan. The process-based approach applied by the Ohio State University Extension Sustainable Development Team results in multi-dimensional indicators created by community residents and leaders. A benefit of this approach is the increased awareness and acceptance of policies established in a community plan. Such an acceptance by residents also leads to the long-term accountability of public officials to implement the plan. Retained through community leaders is a corporate memory that exceeds the short term election cycle often applied by public officials. The result is the continuation of policies and programs necessary to implement a series of activities and policies required to foster change.

## CURRENT PRACTICES IN INDICATOR DEVELOPMENT

In 1998 Ohio State University Extension formed the Sustainable Development Team (Team) to assist local communities in addressing planning issues from a sustainability perspective. The Extension Sustainable Development Team developed a process that incorporated the four cornerstones of sustainability as presented below:

1. Inclusion: Sustainable planning is an *inclusionary* process in governance and resident involvement, seeking to reduce barriers to participation.
2. Long-term: Sustainable planning is *long-term*, looking out 50 years to grand and great-grandchildren, seeking inter-generational equity.
3. Interconnected: Sustainable planning seeks to find the balance among the social, environmental and economic sectors and perspectives in the community.
4. Multi-dimensional indicators: Indicators that address community goals and link together and support the environmental, social and economic desires of community residents are to be developed in an intentional way.

The process developed by the Team became known as the Sustainable Communities Program with the first application being a long term vision and goal setting plan in Noble County, Ohio. Today the Sustainable Communities Program incorporates sustainability principles into numerous community planning processes including community goal setting, economic development plans and comprehensive community plans.

During the past nine years, the Sustainable Communities approach has assisted numerous local community leaders and residents adopt a new perspective in defining their community's well being. These individuals are attracted to a program that helps them apply a method to create an intentional balance between the environmental, economic and social aspects of their community. They are able to push their planning horizon further by concentrating on future generations as the focus for setting community goals and objectives. Community leaders and residents quickly adapt to new definitions of inclusion. They expand the planning process to embrace numerous forms of diversity within the steering committee and empower residents to participate in decision-making through new ways of gathering people. What is most problematic for these same individuals is the creation of indicators to measure the success of reaching goals and to use these indicators as guides when making difficult decisions between conflicting priorities. This dilemma is intensified when the element of multi-dimensionality is added to the indicator development equation.

To help address the dilemma of creating and implementing multi-dimensional indicators as part of a sustainability based planning process, the Ohio State University Extension Sustainable Development team has explored numerous methods of creating local community based models. This paper shares the methodology used to create sustainable multi-dimensional indicators as it outlines the various considerations given to indicator construction and use when applied during the past nine years to community planning efforts. A particular focus is given to the application of multi-dimensional indicator development in an urban setting within the community of Kent, Ohio.

**Indicator characteristics**

The Ohio State University Extension Sustainable Development Team began their development of acceptable community planning indicators based on available literature that defined the characteristics of effective, sustainability-based indicators. Not all indicators are good indicators; some are too difficult to measure, others have no meaning to the local community, and some are difficult to understand. Maureen Hart, one of the early leaders in the field of sustainable indicators, identifies six characteristics of good indicators, listed in Table 1 in the first column. The last four characteristics, listed in column two were chosen in addition by the Team from their experience working with communities.

Table 1: Characteristics of Sustainable Indicators

Multi-dimensional: ties together social, environmental and economic aspects	Measurable: the indicator must be capable of being measure
Relevant: applies to the community	Data Attainable: data is readily available
Understandable: is clear and easily	

<p>understood</p> <p>Usable: the community will use it</p> <p>Long-term: considers future generations</p> <p>Shows linkages: avoids narrow focus</p> <p>(Hart, 1998, p. 98-99)</p>	<p>Cost Effective: the cost of gathering data should not outweigh the benefit of having it - human and financial capacity</p> <p>Politically Acceptable: acceptable as a measurement to local leadership</p>
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The first characteristic that made sustainable indicators unique was adaptation of traditional single dimensional indicators to a multi-dimensional perspective. It is challenging to get local communities to even use indicators as a part of their planning documents. This challenge is intensified when consideration is given to community leaders need to clearly identify the linkages created by a multi-dimensional indicator approach.

As the literature clearly suggested, indicators need to be politically supported and understandable in order to be applied within the local community. To be understandable, multi-dimensional indicators needed to clearly identify not only an environmental component to be measured, but also social and economic components that were also to be assessed. The same indicator must clearly identify the linkage of the three elements of the economic, social and environmental aspects of the community goals. Somehow within this confusing standard, multi-dimensional indicators also needed to be relevant to local goals set by the community, within the capacity of the local community's ability to reach, capable of being easily measured, long term and cost effective for there to be any chance that the indicators would be useable. Finally, the Ohio State University Extension Sustainable Development Team strongly believed that the local community leaders combined with interested residents needed to create their community's indicators, not a team of experts from OSU Extension. Failure to apply this final principle would only assure that the community would not accept the indicators as theirs once the Team left. It was equally important that residents accepted and applied the indicators to the daily decisions they were making around their business and community organization activities.

### **Indicator frameworks**

A further review of the literature around sustainable indicators identified various frameworks for the creation and application of indicators. These various frameworks included:

#### **Single Indicator Framework**

The single indicator framework sought the adoption of a universal sustainable indicator that would replace traditional currently used universal indicators. These

universal indicators appear to be usually created by panels of professionals in the field of sustainability with some participation by residents, most often from a country or international community perspective. Within these single indicators there was a complex linkage of various components that truly represented a linkage and balance between the economic, social and environmental aspects of community. These linkages, however, were not transparent and required a knowledge and understanding of the complexities of community well-being to be fully understood. At the time the Ohio State University Extension Sustainable Development Team was seeking applicable sustainability indicator development methods, a very popular single indicator was the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). This sustainability based indicator was suggested as an alternative to the Gross National Product Indicator (GNP). The GPI represented a stronger intentional application of the social and environmental aspects to community well-being than the economic based GNP.

Consideration was given by the Team to the application of a single indicator approach to local community planning. Although the implementation of a single indicator methodology seemed very applicable to the national dialogue on sustainable goals, the ability of local communities to easily measure, understand, politically support and be cost effective appeared too a challenging task. It seemed too difficult for local community leaders and residents to identify the complex components necessary to adopt a single indicator approach.

#### Specific Sets Framework

When the Ohio State University Extension Sustainable Development Team was exploring the creation of indicators in the late 1990's Maureen Hart was developing her "Guide to Sustainable Community Indicators." Hart identified four frameworks for organizing indicators, represented in Table 2.

Table 2: Indicator Frameworks

<b>Framework</b>	<b>Focus</b>
Category List	Captures the environmental, economic and social aspects of the community
Goal-Indicator Matrix	Relates indicator to set of goals
Driving force-state-response table	Used by decision-makers for analysis
Endowments, liabilities, current results	Measures results of actions

Examples of existing applications of these frameworks was found in a few cities in the U.S., through organizational applications such as the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, and through a number of nation-specific (Natural Step in Sweden). What was common to each framework was the creation of indicators around specific themes.

This use of themes to organize indicators seemed to fit the Sustainable Communities Program well since the planning approach facilitated the community’s vision around selected themes and goals as created through a process of numerous and diverse community brainstorming sessions. Following this design, the leaders and interested residents in Noble County gathered to create a series of indicators around the themes that they had previously agreed upon. Soon, however, it became painfully clear that the selected indicators represented the desires of community leaders with very little understanding by interested residents. Further testing among Noble residents clearly showed the lack of understanding and relevancy. The community was unable to identify the relationship between the economic, social and environmental linkages of the indicators when gathered within theme areas.

### A Goal-Impact-Output Framework

The failure to meet the sustainable indicators standards in Noble County necessitated the Team modify their indicator development model. A new approach was developed for Noble that focused not around theme areas but rather around specific goals of the plan. Community leaders and interested residents met again in a series of sessions to create shared indicators. The group started with a review of the key goals and objectives of the plan and created a number of indicators for each item. Indicators currently used by community agencies were identified along with suggested additional indicators by residents. The result was an objective or goal framework linked to an impact or output indicator. Indicators were created that would help residents understand actions they could take to apply sustainable practices in the community. In addition a set of indicators were developed for each goal that helped community leaders identify actions they could take to apply sustainable practices at the community level. Table 3 shares an example of one indicator developed around this new framework

Table 3: Noble County Report Example

► **Goal: All Noble County residents have access to water and sewer**

Individual Households
Social: Percent of individual households served by public water/sewer Environmental: Percentage of individual household systems tested annually; percentage meeting current clean water standards Economic: Average residential rates for public water and sewer do not exceed 110% of the state averages for comparable systems
Community Systems
Social: Number of inter- and intra-county connections between water systems Environmental: The quality of local streams measured by e-coli, BOD, ammonia and other emerging identified measures Economic: Average residential rates for public water and sewer do not exceed 110% of the state averages for comparable systems

The Ohio State University Extension Sustainable Development Team evaluated the appropriateness of the Noble County Indicators based on the ten qualities of sustainable indicators six months after the adoption of the community report. The community leaders and residents still understood the indicators, found them relevant, identified the multi-dimensional aspect, found them to be cost effective, within the community capacity to reach and measurable on a long term bases. In addition the County Commissioners had used the example indicator in this paper to allocate county grant funds to the development of a water line to serve an additional area of the county. Our university team found this new approach to developing multi-dimensional sustainable indicators to be so successful that it should be tested, with necessary revisions, in our next planning activity in the City of Kent's Comprehensive Planning Process.

## **DEVELOPING RESIDENT FORMULATED INDICATORS**

The City of Kent, located in the northeast region of the State of Ohio, was an early embracer of the sustainable community development philosophy, creating an Environmental Commission in 1995 that was a first step in committing to living in a sustainable manner and initiating a sustainable comprehensive planning process soon thereafter. Kent is part of the largest population density in the state, located in an area that serves as a transition between the Cleveland and the Akron- Canton Metropolitan areas. The community of Kent is the home of Kent State University, a metropolitan campus of 22,317 students with a strong regional focus serving numerous commuting students as well as residential students.

When the desire to engage in comprehensive planning using sustainability principles emerged local leaders looked for an organization that could provide guidance to the city in the design and implementation of a suitable process. They found Ohio State University Extension's Sustainable Communities program, the only program of its type in the State. Soon after, a collaborative partnership was created among the City of Kent, Ohio State University Extension and Kent State University/Urban Design Center which lasted the next three years.

Prior to Kent, the OSU Extension Sustainable Communities Program had experience in sustainable community planning in a number of primarily rural counties in the state Ohio. Lessons learned from the first program undertaken, a sustainable community visioning/goal setting pilot in Noble County in 2000, helped to improve the process implemented in the City of Kent. Also, there were some differences between a rural community and urban community that caused the indicator development process to be modified to account for the complexities of an urban environment.

### **Conceptual framework**

As previously stated, OSU Extension's philosophy of sustainable community development and sustainable comprehensive planning is based on four principles of sustainability: inclusion, long-term, intentional interconnection of social, economic and environmental aspects of community, and multi-dimensional indicators. What the OSU Extension Sustainable Development Team discovered in Kent was, that due to divergent views in this urban setting the use of indicators near to the end of the planning process in the attempt to build consensus and insure sustainability resulted in more resident frustration and conflict. Residents needed to see and understand early on the balance and interconnections so that they could feel their needs were being met. To avoid solidifying these intense divergent views and create more conflict, the process designers chose to build in the interconnectedness and balance during the resident goal setting stage of the plan.

### **The Kent sustainable planning process**

The philosophy outlined above is embedded in OSU Extension's approach to comprehensive planning as implemented in the City of Kent, Ohio, as follows:

First, an inclusionary Steering Committee was created with membership representing the various demographic groups, local organizations and communities of interest present in the City of Kent. These included, on the 39 member committee, environmentalists, retail merchants, ministers, students, residents of the . The Steering Committee met periodically during the comprehensive planning process to provide guidance and liaison with their constituents. A Design Committee was also established in collaboration with KSU and authorized by the President of the University. She identified faculty and staff who could assist the City in the preparation of the comprehensive plan by providing expertise, knowledge and technical assistance in specific critical areas including demographic research and analysis.

Second, a two-phase community-wide visioning process was conducted that sought to develop and articulate a consensus vision for the Kent community. To insure inclusion, local volunteer vision facilitators "went to where people gather" - churches, schools, organizations, neighborhoods, housing developments - wherever there was a familiar place that residents felt comfortable and willing to answer two questions: "*What is it that you value about the Kent community?*" and "*What do you hope the Kent community will be for your grand and great-grandchildren?*" Vision sessions were held in each of the eight Kent neighborhoods, were piggybacked onto organizational meetings such as the Chamber of Commerce, and were held in key locations such as in the downtown business district, the University campus, in local churches and the schools. In total, there were 32 vision/community input sessions held throughout the City.

There were two primary outcomes of the first phase of community-wide visioning sessions in Kent. First, the Steering Committee, planners and the OSU Extension Team articulated a shared community vision based on what they heard emerging as common themes across all of the community visioning sessions. These common themes became the shared consensus of the community and guided the sustainable comprehensive planning process. Second, community priorities began to be identified from community input by the planners at both the individual neighborhood and community-wide level.

To insure that they were accurately reflecting the desires of the community, the Steering Committee and planners used an “accordion model” to obtain input and solicit concurrence on their interpretation of community resident’s input. First, planners went out to the community and facilitated the gathering of broad based input in round one of the community meetings. Afterwards, they articulated in writing the consensus themes they saw emerging, then went back out to the community to share what they had developed and make sure that the vision and preliminary goals as written by the planners matched the community’s desires.

### **Developing multi-dimensional goals and indicators**

Sustainable comprehensive planning incorporates the development of clearly stated indicators of progress, helping each community determine how well they are progressing toward reaching their shared goals and vision. Indicators provide a roadmap to help a community determine whether or not they are on track to sustainability. Much of the literature on indicators recommends that they contain a social, environmental and component so that benefit to all three sectors can be measured using holistic benchmarks.

If you are to look at the Kent Plan’s indicators, you would notice that indicators appear to stand alone, inconsistent with sustainability principles. This is because the Kent plan is unique in its approach to insuring sustainability in that it builds multi-dimensionality in at the *goal prioritization stage* of the planning process before the determination of indicators. Intentionally linking and interconnecting the social, environmental and economic desires of the community occurred in Kent by helping residents build multi-dimensionality into the plan through balancing and linking resident’s goals that emerged during the first two rounds of community meetings.

The agenda for the second round of community meetings shared a report of session one vision results, summarizing the resident’s ideas/input by the three sectors of the community: economic, social and environment (built and natural). Residents were asked to affirm the list and identify priorities in each of the three sectors followed by brainstorming and formulating interconnections with the other sectors for each priorities. As an example, if the priority chosen by the residents was “there are more locally owned businesses in the downtown” (economic), the interconnection to social might be that downtown is a place to gather because of

family friendly entertainment opportunities (social)” and the interconnection to the environment might be “businesses use vacant historic structures in the downtown and orient their entrances to the Cuyahoga River (environment).”

The priorities emerging from round two of the community meetings were reworded into “features” by the OSU Extension Team and the planners, and the interconnections were captured, resulting in the creation of “Interconnection Reports” for each neighborhood and community of interest. Figure 1 below presents examples of interconnection reports for the Crain Neighborhood, University constituents and business interests in Kent. The report presents each priority feature with its original perspective (social, etc.), subsequently linking other, supportive features to it with their perspective of origin. The resulting identification of interconnections led to the development of multi-disciplinary, resident formulated goals.

Table 4: Interconnection Reports – Round Two; City of Kent, Ohio

### **Selected Linkages Identified by Residents**

#### **I. Crain Neighborhood:**

##### ***Social Framework:***

Feature: Small town atmosphere

- ↳ Downtown as a focal point (economy)
- ↳ Preserve Kent’s unique history (environment)
- ↳ Use existing buildings (environment)
- ↳ Value properties that link to the past (environment)

##### ***Environmental Framework:***

Feature: Pedestrian orientation

- ↳ Easy access to businesses (economic), library, schools, parks and friends (social)
- ↳ clean and repaired sidewalks (social)
- ↳ Reduced use of fossil fuels because residents walk (environmental)

##### ***Economic Framework:***

Feature: Kent’s downtown is an economic focal point

- ↳ Downtown is bike and pedestrian friendly (environment)
  - ↳ City residents shovel the sidewalks (social)
    - ↳ Better maintained than other cities (social)
      - ↳ Appease downtown businesses by providing a skateboard park to remove from downtown streets (social & economy)

## **II. Business Community:**

Feature: Kent is home to many locally owned independent small businesses (economy)

- ↳ Vibrant retail and service sector (economy)
  - ↳ A strong public educational system (social)
    - ↳ Street/sidewalk maintenance (social)
      - ↳ Quality recreational opportunities (environment)
        - ↳ Traffic management (environment)

## **III. Kent State University Faculty:**

Feature: Effective code enforcement (social)

- ↳ Downtown as a focal point (economy)
  - ↳ Traffic management (environment)
    - ↳ Pedestrian orientation (environment)

## **IV. Kent State University Students:**

Feature: There is traffic management (environment)

- ↳ Kent's residents support appropriate economic development (economy)
  - ↳ KSU contributes to the local economy (economic)
    - ↳ Sidewalk/street maintenance (social)
      - ↳ Recycling (social)

## **V. Chamber of Commerce:**

Feature: Downtown is a focal point for the community (economy)

- ↳ Kent is home to many locally owned, independent small businesses (economy)
  - ↳ Kent's retail and service sectors are vibrant (economic)

- ↳ Existing buildings should be used (environment)
- ↳ Preserve Kent's unique history (environment)
- ↳ Retain small town atmosphere (social)
- ↳ Town-gown interaction (social)
  - ↳ Kent has a strong public educational system (social)

The linkages that were developed in round three of the planning process pointed the way to the development of indicators to measure, for the long term, whether or not the community's multi-dimensional goals were being met. After round three of the community meetings was concluded, the planners and professionals once again took the community input from this latest round, including the top priority features (goals) and developed draft indicators for the city wide plan that they believed would be effective in helping the community to stay on track with its sustainability goals. The approach developed in Noble County, with professionals drafting the indicators and seeking understanding and concurrence from residents, was once again utilized successfully in Kent. The list of indicators was once again taken back out to the community by the planners and the OSU Extension Sustainable Communities Team in a fourth round of meetings during which the draft indicators were presented for resident modification and/or concurrence. Once the residents made their changes and gave their approval, the final draft of the Bicentennial Plan based on resident generated vision, goals and indicators was prepared for presentation to the City Council with the goal of adoption. The format for this plan, with selected goals, indicators and implementation plans is presented in Table 4.

In the final plan document, separate reports were prepared for each of the eight neighborhoods and 12 top-priority city-wide goals were identified. City-wide goals are based on the shared vision emerging throughout the community and the consensus identification of top priority features as determined by Kent residents. The following tables provide a flavor of the city-wide goals and indicators that Kent included in the Bicentennial Plan. For a full listing of indicators and a complete copy of the sustainability plan, please visit the City of Kent web site at <http://www.kentohio.org/> and access Special Reports, Comprehensive Plan.

**ENVIRONMENT:** *Natural Environment*

Kent has a number of quality recreational opportunities and facilities. The community acknowledges the great asset that neighborhoods play in building diversity in the City of Kent. Resident's vision saw maximizing local recreational programs while challenging us to improve and expand programming and facilities in neighborhoods rather than one central location. Comments included using the Cuyahoga River for kayaking, more neighborhood based programming, greater

accessibility to all of the parks, a swimming pool, skate park, and more youth and teen programs.

Preservation of natural resources. In addition to recreation programming and facilities, Kent residents feel very strongly about the preservation of natural resources. This includes riparian protection of creeks and the Cuyahoga River, protecting wetlands including the Kent Bog, preserving green space in the community and the growth pattern of Kent State University.

Table 5: Natural Environment Plan and Indicators

<b>Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Implementation Team</b>
Expand offered recreation and leisure services via the community network of neighborhood parks in conjunction with the Parks & Recreation Master Plan.	Number of neighborhood park based programs  Attendance over time	Parks & Recreation Board  Residents
The Cuyahoga river is utilized as a recreation facility for canoeing and/or kayaking, operated either by the Parks & Recreation Board or a private entity.	Construction and/or lease of rental facility completed	City Council Parks & Recreation Board  Kent Historical Society  Chamber of Commerce
Interconnect all community parks with "The Portage" by 2015 (a regional bikeway system)	Number of parks connected each year  Number of lane miles added	City Council Parks & Recreation Board Kent State University
Expand the use of pervious pavement systems in all city parks and city facilities where parking lots are to be constructed or expanded.	Number of parking lots in city parks/facilities reconstructed or replaced with pervious materials.	Parks & Recreation Board
The City of Kent enacts riparian corridor protection ordinances, including creeks and tributaries of the Cuyahoga River.	Passage of Riparian Corridor Ordinance	City Council Community Development Dept. Environmental Commission Planning Commission Kent Environmental Council Chamber of Commerce

**ENVIRONMENT: *Built Environment***

Traffic management was seen as a key component of building a sustainable future. Recommendations included improving traffic flow on State Routes to the KSU campus, traffic calming, construction of street boulevards, increased intersection safety, traffic signalization, street maintenance and improved entrances to Kent.

Kent has a pedestrian orientation. Related to the issue of traffic management, Kent residents desire their community to be walk-able. Residents want intersections to be safe for pedestrians and be able to walk to activity centers

within their respective neighborhoods (parks, stores, churches, restaurants, etc.). The concept of being walk able is also tied to the idea of linking neighborhoods with bike paths, which function for all types of pedestrian/non-motorized traffic (skaters, skateboards, bicycles).

Existing buildings should be used. Kent residents like the older buildings in the community and would rather see existing buildings used rather than demolished and replaced with new. This feeling is tied especially to older, historic buildings that have served as community landmarks.

Table 6: Built Environment Plan and Indicators

<b>Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Implementation Team</b>
PARTA (public bus system) develops a plan to increase ridership by Kent residents and KSU students, including car-pooling programs.	Net increase in PARTA ridership  Net increase in car-pooling/RideShare program	PARTA  Kent Residents
Develop a plan for traffic calming in existing and new neighborhoods.	Passage of traffic plan by Kent City Council	City Council Safety Departments Community Development Department Public Services Department
Construct street boulevards on Haymaker Parkway and at Kent's entrances as part of road widening and redevelopment projects.	Number of boulevards constructed	Public Service Department  Community Development Department
Identify locations for installation of sidewalks; develop a 5-10 year plan for installation and repair of sidewalks throughout Kent including cost sharing sidewalk repair program.	Number of sidewalk construction locations identified  Amount of public dollars committed to sidewalk installation  Number of feet of sidewalk replaced or installed	City Council  Public Service Department
Create historic residential and commercial districts as identified in the Neighborhood Plans by 2010.	Number of districts created	City Council Community Develop. Dept. Planning Commission Kent Historical Society
The City of Kent proposes a grant, revolving loan and tax abatement programs for façade improvements for retail centers throughout the City of Kent, including downtown.	Amount of grant funds received  Amount of funds committed to a revolving fund  Amount of tax abatement dollars committed	City Council  Community Development Department

**SOCIAL:**

Neighborhoods are protected. The social fabric of Kent is found within the residential neighborhoods. Residents identify heavily with and value the neighborhoods in which they live, and provide them with a sense of place. The diversity of the population, housing types and affordability of Kent’s residential neighborhoods are highly valued. Residents want their neighborhoods protected, not simply from crime, but also from increased vehicle traffic and the influx of student housing into neighborhoods that have been primarily single-family. Residents also have a desire for the renovation of the housing stock in older neighborhoods.

Another strong point of pride for Kent residents is the Kent City Schools. The Kent community has a reputation for supporting school levies and educational initiatives. Proficiency scores are competitive with surrounding school districts. Overall, residents are very pleased with the performance of the school system and look forward to continued positive outcomes in the local educational system.

Kent residents value the small town atmosphere. Kent residents value the characteristics of small towns that are traditionally found in rural, non-urban areas or found in the suburban edge of development. Kentites like the compact size of Kent and see Kent as a small town. The presence of the University adds an urban dynamic, and provides additional cultural and intellectual amenities. Similarly Kent’s geographic location provides a proximity to urban centers of Akron and Cleveland.

Table 7: Social Plan and Indicators

<b>Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Implementation Team</b>
Identify and register historic buildings with the Historic Society and the National Register.	Number identified and registered per year	Community Development Department
	Percentage of qualified buildings that are registered	Kent Historical Society
Promote the conversion of rental housing units by promoting homeownership loan programs.	Number of loans per year	City Council
	Number of conversions per year	Community Development Department
Continue community support of the Kent city Schools	Increase in Kent School proficiency test scores	KSU Kent City Schools Kent Residents
	Increase in school rating by State Education Department	
KSU should encourage and invite the community to participate in activities on campus.	Number of activities per year	KSU Chamber of Commerce Community Service Groups Kent Residents
	Number of participants	

	Number of sponsoring groups	
Encourage more downtown community activities to supplement existing ones.	Number of downtown activities per year	City Council Downtown Merchants Chamber of Commerce
Develop a plan for traffic calming in existing and new neighborhoods.	Passage of traffic plan by Kent City Council	City Council Safety & Service Depts. Community Develop. Dept.

**ECONOMY:**

There is much support for the location of locally owned small businesses in Kent. For example, Kent residents want to attract restaurants that are not franchises. There is a vision that each small business will attract other small businesses. Kentites also value the existence of a daily hometown newspaper and the local Chamber of Commerce.

There is a desire for Kent to have a diverse economy with a social and environmental conscience. There is a recognition that Kent needs to have a tax base that is supported by commerce maintaining high-technology jobs. Tax incentives should be judiciously awarded. Industrial jobs created in or located in Kent should pay a living wage. Local government impacts and fees should not be a hindrance to businesses locating or operating in Kent. Development should occur in vacant or under-utilized land and buildings. Development should not have a negative impact upon Kent’s quality of life. Residents see the value in a regional economy and encourage the collaborative creation of joint economic districts between local governments. Tourism is also seen as a viable economic development sector.

Kent’s downtown is an economic focal point and gathering place for the community. the downtown business district should be accessible to students and market products and services to students. Downtown should remain walk able and be more retail-oriented. Cultural arts should support the development of downtown shopping, activities and festivals. There is great interest in more restaurants that are unique, diverse and high in quality. Older buildings need to be redeveloped and commercial opportunities developed along the Cuyahoga River. Residents commented on the need for the small town atmosphere to be preserved and the continued beautification of the downtown. This redevelopment and beautification need to include the preservation of downtown’s historic architecture.

Table 8: Economic Plan and Indicators

<b>Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Implementation Team</b>
Kent residents need to shop in Kent.	Number of residents shopping in Kent determined by merchant customer surveys Increase in annual sales	Kent Residents Chamber of Commerce Kent Merchants
Downtown merchants will organize to continue efforts to improve commercial activity in	Establishment of organization with number of memberships in Kent	Chamber of Commerce Downtown Merchants

the downtown including sidewalk sale events during the year.	Downtown organization Number of events per year	
Investigate and implement Green Building codes where appropriate.	Number of projects completed with Green Building procedures	Community Development Department
Greater communication between KSU and the City of Kent regarding emerging technologies and opportunities for employment growth in the City	Number of new jobs created from "spin-off" businesses	KSU Community Development Department
Base tax incentives; increasing incentives for those that pay living wages	Number of new jobs paying a living wage	City Council Community Development Department
Create architectural standards for downtown buildings and other commercial zones in Kent	Passage of downtown architectural standards by Kent City Council	City Council Community Development Department
Continue to promote Kent through the Chamber and Central Portage County visitors and Convention Bureau	Number of info/inquiries Number of web page hits Dollar amount of hotel taxes received per year	Chamber of Commerce

## LESSONS LEARNED

Both Noble's and Kent's plans were many years in the making. Planning processes have been described as having three phases: Planning, selling and implementation. More time spent in the planning phase results in less time needed for selling to the community and leadership, and leads to implementation faster. While resident-formulated sustainable plans take time, the ownership of the plan by the community has been reinforced by the progress already made. Only a year after the Kent Bicentennial plan was completed, almost 70% of the implementation plans were either underway or completed.

The Ohio State University Sustainable Communities Team has learned a great deal in the past seven years. While there are many good sustainable planning and indicator development processes out there, we believe that our experience has affirmed that the Goal-Impact-Output Framework works very well at the community level in guiding residents and leaders through the formulation of multi-dimensional indicators that meet the characteristics of effectiveness. Beginning in Noble County we facilitated a process that tied multi-dimensional indicators to specific community goals. Then, in Kent, we guided a process of resident generated goals designed around features that fit together and were multi-dimensional. When residents in Kent began to look at their goals through the lens of sustainability, interconnecting the social, environmental and economic perspectives of the community, they clearly understood multi-dimensionality.

The result is a resident-generated plan with community consensus goals that fit well together and are supported by effective indicators. Even though the indicators that Kent selected may seem to stand alone, they are clearly and powerfully connected in a multi-dimensional way because of the linkages that they foster between interconnected and sustainable community goals.

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