

Planning Digest

Linking Welfare Clients to the Private Sector

In many ways, the economic development work of the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce is very similar to the work of Chambers of Commerce across the country. However, the Durham Chamber has developed a unique program in cooperation with the Durham County Department of Social Services (DSS) to link welfare clients with opportunities in the private sector. Tom White, President and former Vice President of Economic Development, has been instrumental in the Chamber's work to spread the benefits of economic growth to people and places that might not benefit from general economic growth. White believes that regional growth is not in and of itself sufficient to help everyone, because there are barriers to accessing that growth. His approach to "spreading the benefits" is guided by his understanding of how to help distressed areas. According to White, there are two strategies for dealing with poverty and disinvestment:

- (1) **individual mobility:** helping residents get skills to improve their lives, which includes the possibility of moving out of the area; and
- (2) **community reinvestment:** helping companies move into the area.

For several years, the Durham Chamber has pursued the individual mobility strategy by contracting with the DSS to provide job development and placement assistance for DSS clients. One staff person, paid by the Chamber, works in a job placement office with two DSS and one Employment Security Commission (ESC) staff. The Chamber staff contacts employers, educates the business community about the benefits of working with people on welfare and the special needs of that population, and works with DSS clients on their resumes. The Chamber's Vice President of Economic Development in particular serves as a bridge between CEOs and DSS. Although a few other Chambers in North Carolina work with the Department of Social Services, no other Chamber has this type of contractual arrangement.

This program helps welfare clients find jobs, but it also furthers the Chamber's broader mission of general economic development. The strongest constraint on Durham's growth is the entry-level labor force. Companies are sometimes reluctant to locate in Durham because there are not enough qualified entry-level workers. Carol Hunt, former Director of Durham's Work First program, explained that companies can always bring in their top people, but they want to recruit locally for entry-level jobs.

White and Hunt, as the developers of the program, see no contradiction between place-based and people-based development, or between providing social services and encouraging private investment. As Carol Hunt said, "You can't revitalize a community without revitalizing the people." According to White, a distressed area needs a combination of public social services and private for-profit investment. Bringing in social services, providing job training, and addressing infrastructure needs, including dealing with crime and abandoned buildings, will help attract businesses. White suggests that inner cities need different municipal services (social services) to attract business investments than do suburbs (water, sewer, and transportation). At the same time, social services alone will not provide the jobs necessary for long-term improvement.

For more information on the contractual arrangement between the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Social Services, contact Sherlene Wilson at (919) 560-8022.

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Sustainability Goes Local

In 1997, the promotion of local sustainable development was strengthened by the creation of the new Joint Center for Sustainable Communities in Washington, DC. The Joint Center, run by the U.S. Conference of Mayors (UCSM) and the National

Association of Counties (NaCo), will serve primarily as a resource for local government officials. Its chief goal is to implement the recommendations of *Sustainable America*, the legacy publication of the President's Council for Sustainable Development. Many of its aims mirror those long championed by planners such as growth management, urban revitalization, and resource conservation. Viewing strong communities as the foundation of a healthy society, the Joint Center hopes to make "sustainability" both a household word and a reality for cities and counties.

Mission and Structure

Multi-jurisdictional partnerships are the mantra of the Joint Center and a cornerstone of its mission. The hope is that, spurred by positive examples and success stories, local governments will recognize their growing interdependence and begin to think regionally. The Joint Center also emphasizes the connection between environmental, economic, and social issues, and advocates a holistic, comprehensive approach to problem-solving. To encourage local action, it offers technical assistance, policy forums, an information clearinghouse, and descriptions of best management practices.

The Joint Center is funded by several federal agencies including EPA and the Departments of Energy, Commerce, and Agriculture. Interestingly, it has two co-directors with two separate offices. This deliberate arrangement allows the Joint Center to stay connected with, and harness the resources of, its parent organizations. While USCM and NaCo have worked together on a few national issues, they do not have a long history of collaboration. Consequently, harmonizing the agendas of these two associations (and of cities and counties in general) will be both ground-breaking and challenging.

Local Successes

Though still in its first year, the Joint Center is attempting to be a catalyst for local collaborative planning. As a model for city-county cooperation, it's showcasing the impressive efforts of Detroit and its neighbor, Wayne County. The "motor city" is on an economic rebound but its redevelopment plans are frustrated by an estimated 50,000 brownfield sites. To tackle the problem, Detroit and Wayne County created an on-going sustainability roundtable. This effort stemmed from a realization that the fate of both

jurisdictions was intertwined and that the brownfields problem should be viewed in connection with other regional issues.

The Center is also promoting sustainable rebuilding after natural disasters. After the catastrophic spring floods in the Dakotas, local mayors were searching for advice on how to rebuild their communities. The Joint Center funded a visit by former mayor Dennis Knoblach, whose Illinois home-town was hit by the Midwestern floods of 1993. Knoblach shared his experience and urged elected officials to rebuild more sustainably by re-thinking urban form, improving energy efficiency, and reducing impervious surfaces.

Spreading the Word

In addition to helping local governments directly, the Joint Center has been actively advertising the concept of sustainability. One avenue is through NaCo and USCM annual meetings, which this year included sessions on creating sustainable communities. The USCM meeting featured Vice President Al Gore who linked sustainability to brownfield re-use. The NaCo meeting presented Randall Arendt who explained to county officials how his conservation design can aid sustainability. Recently, local officials have become directly involved in the guidance of the Joint Center through a newly created advisory committee. For more information about the Joint Center for Sustainable Communities, see their websites at:

www.naco.org/members/sustain.htm

www.usmayors.org/sustainable

This page links to other interesting sites including: President's Council on Sustainable Development, Department of Energy's Center for Excellence in Sustainable Development, Smart Growth Network, U.S Conference of Mayors, and National Association of Counties.

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