

Study Circle Topics and Objectives

1. Sustainable Regional Economy

Objectives:

- Explore sustainable management systems for area businesses (integrating the economic, social, and environmental aspects of an enterprise).
- Examine how livable wages and benefits like health insurance can impact the overall business climate and social capital base of the community.
- Explore how to increase connectivity between local and regional businesses and manufacturers with goals of reducing wastes, recycling materials, capturing energy streams, reinforcing regional business infrastructure. (Manure and methane anyone?)
- Explore options for creating or attracting new enterprises associated with sustainable economic development (e.g. recycling-based manufacturing, Cornell research spinoffs).
- Discuss workforce skills and training needed for sustainably-managed businesses and new “green ventures.”
- Discuss ways to support locally-owned businesses and fair trade practices.
- Identify opportunities for doing more local purchasing (such as using local suppliers of common business items like envelopes to reduce transportation costs).

2. Renewable Energy and Responsible Construction

Objectives:

- Examine feasibility of developing alternative sources of energy in the region.
- Explore education strategies that help individuals and institutions change their energy use patterns.
- Look at energy conservation opportunities in existing construction and infrastructure.
- Explore saving energy and recycling resources in new construction and infrastructure.
- Discuss ways to incorporate design and construction elements that allow residents to age in place.
- Consider ways to integrate energy savings and responsible construction into affordable housing projects.

3. Infrastructure Design for a Sustainable Community

Objectives:

- Consider all the kinds of infrastructure (social, ecosystem, physical) and their interweaving.
- Discuss how to pursue goal of optimum design of roads, utilities, residences, and commercial units while preserving open space, agricultural resources, viewsheds, etc.
- Explore intermunicipal linkages and planning for business growth and population growth with respect to land use controls and zoning, transportation networks/options, public facilities, utility lines, and housing for all income levels.
- Identify barriers (attitudinal, legal, economic) to adopting development patterns more conducive to sustainable communities.
- Suggest ways to integrate the design of physical infrastructure into social goals for health, public safety, community cohesiveness.

4. Systems for Community Well Being

Objectives:

- Explore ways to increase quality of life for all residents in ways that anticipate needs of the future.
- Consider how to integrate health care and disease prevention into design of our communities.
- Analyze workforce issues around living wage, affordable/available housing, health care, training and continuing education
- Examine demographic trends in income, age structure of population, workforce composition and anticipate infrastructure design elements that would reduce future vulnerabilities.
- Explore how best to involve youth in working toward sustainability.
- Explore ways that church networks and neighborhood groups can support wellness initiatives.
- Identify barriers to integrating social welfare needs into economic and infrastructure planning.

5. Moving toward a Sustainable Culture

Objectives:

- Explore the social and cultural barriers to adopting sustainable lifestyles.
- Discuss the process of social change and what methods, experiences, events cause humans to shift their belief systems.
- Consider the American experience and worldviews of our various subcultural groups and explore the belief and value structures that result in unsustainable lifestyle choices and business decisions.
- Share what is known about using effective metaphors, providing transformative experiences, or successfully framing issues that aids in shifting a culture.
- Propose new ways that education, media, and the arts can facilitate adoption of new values.