

Local Governments, Social Equity, and Sustainable Communities

ADVANCING SOCIAL EQUITY GOALS TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY

CASE STUDY SERIES



ADVANCING SOCIAL EQUITY
in Dubuque, Iowa



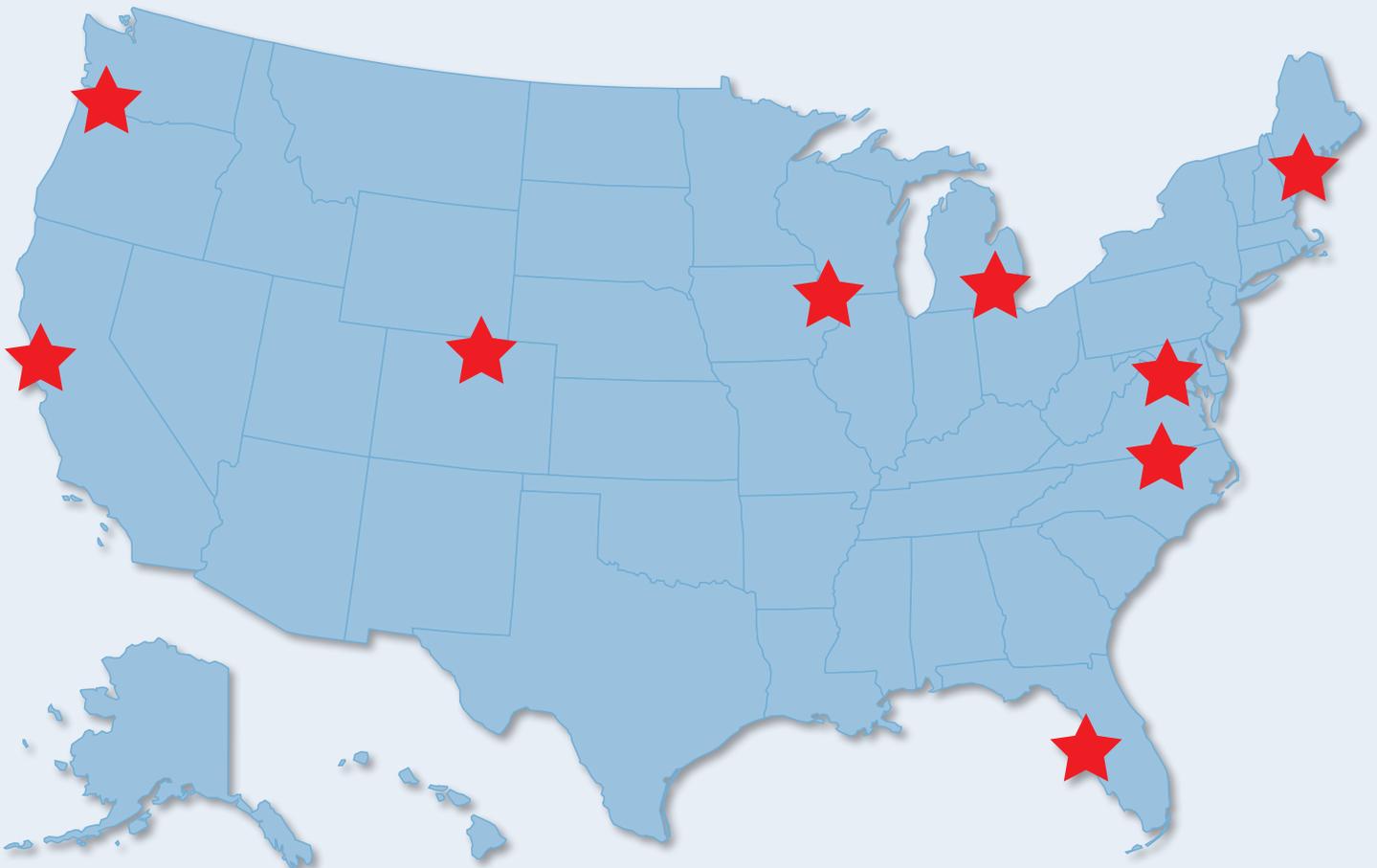
ICMA

ABOUT THIS PROJECT: ADVANCING SOCIAL EQUITY GOALS TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY

This research was conducted by ICMA and Arizona State University to identify and describe current activities, leading practices, and achievements of sustainable communities created through a comprehensive, integrated approach supported by inclusive engagement. Based on results of the ICMA Sustainability Survey in 2010, a follow-up survey was sent to 300 local governments whose original responses showed high levels of sustainability activity. Using results from the follow-up survey and primary and secondary research on leading social sustainability practices around the United States, nine communities whose responses indicated high levels of social equity-related activity were selected for case studies. Case study communities include the following:*

- Washtenaw County, MI (Pop. 344,791) and Ann Arbor, MI (Pop. 113,934)
- Dubuque, IA (Pop. 57,637)
- Hayward, CA (Pop. 144,186)
- Manatee County, FL (Pop. 322,833)
- Lewiston, ME (Pop. 36,592)
- Durham, NC (Pop. 228,330)
- Arlington, VA (Pop. 207,627)
- Clark County, WA (425,363)
- Fort Collins, CO (Pop. 143,986)

Each case study details findings from individual communities that provide insight into how they have been able to promote social equity and achieve greater social sustainability through their policies, programs, and other activities. Data was collected primarily through face-to-face interviews and secondary sources.



*Populations based on 2010 Census base.

Advancing Social Equity Goals to Achieve Sustainability: Case Study Series

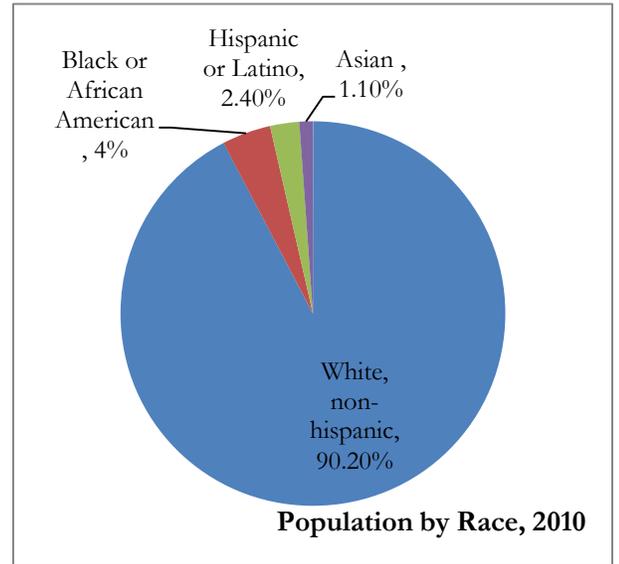
Advancing Social Equity in Dubuque, Iowa
By Tad McGalliard, ICMA

In this Report

Community Profile	2
Findings in Brief.....	2
History of Sustainability and Social Equity in Dubuque, Iowa.....	3
Findings	3
List of Study Participants.....	14
Endnotes	16

Community Profile

- **Form of Government:** Council-Manager
- **County Commission:** Seven councilors including the mayor.
- **Demographic Information (2012):**
 - **Total Population:** 58,155
 - **Poverty Rate:** 13.2%
- **Annual Budget (FY2013):** \$108,848,274 in operating funds
- **Sustainability and Outreach Annual Budget:**
Approximately \$100k in basic operating funds (\$15K out of city manager's office for 2014)
- **Sustainability Plans and Strategies:** Sustainable Dubuque, March 2008 (Summary, 24 pgs.)
- **Number of Staff Dedicated to Sustainability:** One FTE sustainable community coordinator
- **Location in Government:** Coordinated out of the city manager's office
- **Major Social Equity Activities in the Community:** Strategic sustainability planning, citizen engagement, sustainable development, education, workforce development.



Findings in Brief

- **FINDING 1** – The city's brand—Sustainable Dubuque—provides an organizing theme, vision, and management principle for achieving social equity and community goals.
- **FINDING 2** – Meaningful citizen engagement helps local government leaders and managers as well as local partners design, develop, and implement effective and acceptable programs and partnerships for social and community vibrancy.
- **FINDING 3** – Partnerships with local and regional organizations are essential in solving problems and confronting challenges for creating a more livable and sustainable community.
- **FINDING 4** – Creating more sustainable communities for the next generation is critical.
- **FINDING 5** – Community sustainability is closely related to workforce development and economic stability among the most vulnerable populations.
- **FINDING 6** – Community and social vibrancy in Dubuque proceeds in step with economic advancement and redevelopment that build on the region's past.

History of Sustainability and Social Equity in Dubuque, Iowa

From its humble beginnings in northern Minnesota to the deltas of southern Louisiana and eventually to the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River is America's second-longest river. Dotting its shoreline are municipalities ranging from major metropolitan areas such as St. Louis and Memphis to mid-sized cities, towns, and villages where the river has shaped the way of life for generations.

The City of Dubuque, Iowa, officially chartered in 1837, was named after a French fur trader and explorer, Julien Dubuque, who had settled in the area after learning about nearby lead mines. Throughout its history, Dubuque has leveraged its access to the river as mining, agriculture, and manufacturing helped to create the “masterpiece on the Mississippi.”

The masterpiece started to unravel, however, in the 1980s as major employers in farm equipment manufacturing, food processing, and other industries shuttered their doors. This set in motion a rapid rise in unemployment to almost 23 percent in 1982 and the resultant exodus of residents seeking a new start and greener economic pastures.

After several years of decline, public and private sector leaders began the visioning and planning process that would eventually transform Dubuque into the showcase of a sustainable community that a worldwide network of admirers and emulators now perceive it to be. Dubuque was one of the first recipients of the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants in FY10 and one of the first communities that HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan and U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood visited to promote the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and bring visibility to the sustainability agenda.

Findings

FINDING 1 – The city's brand—Sustainable Dubuque—provides an organizing theme, vision, and management principle for achieving social equity and community goals.

Like many municipalities, Dubuque was working to create a more livable municipality without the benefit of a community sustainability brand. After the economic hardship of the 1980s, city leaders and residents launched a new planning process focused on revitalizing Dubuque. The first major effort, the Vision 2000 process, was held in 1991 and 1992. Engaging more than 5,000 citizens, the effort eventually led to the adoption of a new comprehensive plan in 1995—the first update to the city's comprehensive plan since the 1930s.

The 2005 election of a new mayor, coupled with a sympathetic city council, helped to create growing awareness about sustainability as an organizing framework for community vibrancy. Within a few years, planning for Sustainable Dubuque began. And as the city's sustainability report says, “It's [about] more than just the environment.”¹

Dubuque has established itself as a regional and national leader in its ability to collaboratively partner to achieve community goals. What Dubuque is achieving collectively today through

its Sustainable Dubuque model is the direct result of the knowledge and understanding that sustainability is a balanced approach to long-term life quality. It is a rare approach to life quality where no one in the community is excluded . . . everyone who wants to do so can participate and contribute.²

Unlike other communities that have adopted sustainability, Dubuque has not created a stand-alone sustainability planning document. Rather, its approach has been to develop a broad set of framing principles that are incorporated into more traditional planning and governmental processes. Sustainable Dubuque's 12 principles for a more sustainable community are as follows:

Economic Prosperity

- **Regional Economy:** Dubuque is a community that values a diversified regional economy with opportunities for new and green market jobs, products, and services
- **Smart Energy Use:** Dubuque is a community that values energy conservation and expanded use of renewable energy as a means to save money and protect the environment
- **Resource Management:** Dubuque is a community that values the benefits of reducing, reusing and recycling resources
- **Community Design:** Dubuque is a community that values the built environment of the past, present, and future which contributes to its identity, heritage, and sense of place

Environmental Integrity

- **Healthy Air:** Dubuque is a community that values fresh air, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and minimized health risks
- **Clean Water:** Dubuque is a community that values water as a source of life and seeks to preserve and manage it in all forms
- **Native Plants and Animals:** Dubuque is a community that values biodiversity through the preservation restoration, and connection of nature and people

Social/Cultural Vibrancy

- **Reasonable Mobility:** Dubuque is a community that values safe, reasonable and equitable choices to access live, work and play opportunities
- **Green Buildings:** Dubuque is a community that values a productive and healthy built environment
- **Healthy Local Foods:** Dubuque is a community that values the benefits of wholesome food from local producers, distributors, farms, gardens, and hunters
- **Community Knowledge:** Dubuque is a community that values education, empowerment, and engagement to achieve economic prosperity, environmental integrity and social/cultural vibrancy
- **Community Health and Safety:** Dubuque is a community that values systems, policies, and engagement to ensure that all residents have access to healthy and safe lifestyle choices.³

When Sustainable Dubuque was finalized, it was hoped that sustainability would become a broad visionary approach rather than an overly prescriptive plan with multiple pages of objectives, action items, new policy recommendations, and programs. The city describes Sustainable Dubuque as “the

lens through which city operations are developed and analyzed. Likewise, there are numerous community initiatives active . . . , along with businesses that are finding ways to save money and improve their environment and their community by implementing the principles that define Sustainable Dubuque.”⁴

The city and community continue to build their local brand through national recognition programs. In recent years, the Milken Institute, Moodys, *Forbes*, *Fast Company*, *Site Selection*, and *Kiplinger* have rated Dubuque highly in several of their rankings. In 2013, the Ash Center for Democratic Governance at Harvard University named Sustainable Dubuque as one of its top 25 Innovations in American Government award winners. The All-America City designation recognizes cities and communities that partner to tackle local and regional challenges and have exceptional outcomes. Dubuque was awarded that designation in 2007 and then again in 2012 and 2013.

Building and supporting brand awareness is important for moving community social equity projects forward, for increasing buy-in from all stakeholders, and for enhancing chances for success. “Because of the engagement process that we undertook for creating the [Sustainable Dubuque] vision or brand, we now have our businesses with international presence, students going out into the community talking about being a part of this. Because of the inclusive approach to developing brand, we have created something that everyone, regardless of what sector, is talking about: the sustainability focus,” explained Cori Burbach, Dubuque’s community sustainability coordinator, in a recent ICMA webinar.⁵

FINDING 2 – Meaningful citizen engagement helps local government leaders and managers as well as local partners design, develop, and implement effective and acceptable programs and partnerships for social and community vibrancy.

Citizen engagement as a necessary part of regional, community, or urban planning has had eras of prominence and times when decision making was concentrated and compartmentalized in the hands of experts. However, in today’s world, new technologies and the speed with which information flows from source to mass distribution often ensure that citizens will be engaged formally or otherwise. Dubuque has long recognized the benefit and value of engaging citizens in planning and program development. As noted earlier, nearly 5,000 residents participated in the city’s Vision 2000 community planning process, and from that beginning the city has never looked back, using both high touch and high tech approaches.

Sustainable Dubuque

Sustainable Dubuque, like other initiatives in the city, was launched with grassroots and civic engagement to identify priority objectives and goals. It was led by a citizen task force that included representatives from a wide variety of local stakeholder organizations, such as the local government, educational institutions, ecumenical organizations, businesses, and nonprofits. During the course of a two-year process, the task force delivered community presentations and facilitated the completion of about 900 citizen surveys.

Dubuque 2.0 and the Sustainable Dubuque Collaboration

Dubuque 2.0 was organized as a follow-on effort from the original Sustainable Dubuque initiative. Led by the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque (CFGD) and the Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, and leveraging a grant from the Knight Foundation, Dubuque 2.0 used a dedicated website to engage community members from a variety of professions in conversations about strategies for embedding sustainability actions in their own lives. Evolving from this effort was the formation of the Sustainable Dubuque Collaboration, which aims to create a viable community-supported organization that will engage with residents, foster education and learning, take advantage of existing partnerships and develop new ones in order to create a more sustainable community.

Envision 2010

In 2005, the CFGD and the chamber of commerce kick-started a grassroots effort to engage the region in a community visioning process to identify transformative ideas for the future. The process tapped the creativity of nearly 13,000 residents. More than 2,300 ideas were submitted, and after a review process, the final ten ideas for creating social and community vibrancy were selected for development.⁶

Each of the projects selected by the Envision 2010 process was adopted by a local organizational champion, and many have progressed toward completion or major milestones. For example, in

ENVISION 2010

- **America's River Phase II.** Expand the Mississippi River Museum campus with Rivers of America Museum, large screen theater, children's museum, science center, eco-tours, water taxis and river research center. Restore the Shot Tower, utilize the Brewery, introduce canals and boardwalks with restaurants, shops and recreational activities.
- **Bilingual Education Curriculum.** Partner with local teachers, parents and university faculty to develop, establish and integrate an education curriculum of foreign language from early childhood through high school. Encourage every child in Dubuque to speak two languages upon high school graduation. Better prepare our future workforce and attract businesses to the area.
- **Community-wide Wireless.** Make Dubuque a "wireless" city by creating community-wide wireless accessibility to the Internet, available to residents, businesses, law enforcement, governments and visitors. Encourage economic growth, attract businesses and retain young people, provide technology tools to fire and police for greater safety.
- **Community Health Center.** Build a Community Health Center that would provide high quality affordable medical, dental and preventive care for all, regardless of ability to pay, for those who are uninsured and underinsured. The Center would provide laboratory and x-ray services, patient case management, pharmacy services, translation and transportation assistance.
- **Indoor/Outdoor Performing Arts Center.** Build a state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor performing arts center to present the finest in music, opera, theater, dance and educational presentations. The facility could be constructed at The Port of Dubuque with true concert hall acoustics designed to serve local organizations, plus major touring artists and theater attractions.
- **Integrated Walking/Biking/Hiking Trail System.** Create an integrated trail system throughout the Dubuque and Asbury communities to encourage recreation and wellness. Connect all of the trail systems to the Port of Dubuque Riverwalk, Heritage Trail, E.B. Lyons and Mines of Spain. Develop safe, paved trails, with a corresponding website and maps, plus restrooms, benches and bike racks.
- **Library Services Expansion.** Expand city library services by renovating the historic portion of Carnegie Stout Library and establishing a new west-end location. Create space to expand the existing collection, increase computer/Internet resources and offer naturally lit reading areas and a coffee bar. Deepen the community's commitment to literacy for people of all ages.
- **Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.** Enhance and strengthen in- and out-patient mental health and substance abuse services, including children with ADHD and autism. Advocate for an improved system of funding for mental health and substance abuse services for all in need. Expand support services for children with ADHD and autism to become a year-round continuum of care.
- **Passenger Train Service.** Develop a passenger train service for business and pleasure travel to out-of-town accommodations, meetings/convention, attractions or cultural events. Explore trains with fine dining and entertainment options to areas such as Chicago. Make it easier for tourists to visit our community via rail.
- **Warehouse District Revitalization.** Identify a Warehouse District by converting buildings into multi-use structures containing businesses, restaurants, shops and residences. Develop a registry defining buildings in the district, and include information regarding ownership, past usage, present status and structural integrity. Encourage investment by potential developers.

2007, the Crescent Community Health Center opened to provide high-quality health, dental, and wellness care for the community's uninsured and/or low-income residents. In addition to other services, Crescent has opened a community garden in partnership with other organizations to provide residents with fresh local produce as well as with wellness and nutrition information.⁷

As a founding principle of strategies to create a more sustainable and livable place, local governments should robustly engage their residents in participatory practices to ensure that the local priorities are baked into potential solutions. As an article in the *National Civic Review* suggests: "Each community has its own sense of exceptionalism in confronting sustainability issues. Local context is always important, but . . . there are also some common ingredients for success."⁸

Deep, sustained, and meaningful civic engagement seems to be one of those common ingredients that encourages citizens and key local organizations to become part of the sustainability "brand." Dubuque's engagement efforts have ensured that partnering and codelivering of needed services and programming have been elevated to a prevailing practice of local governance in the community and region.⁹

FINDING 3 – Partnerships with local and regional organizations are essential in solving problems and confronting challenges for creating a more livable and sustainable community.

It is almost passé to say that the world is more interconnected now than at any time in history, and the trend is for even more connectivity. The advent of networking technologies—from message boards to wikis, from blogs to Facebook—has increased the ability of people to connect, explore, and act, as messages, status updates, and videos go viral in communities and countries around the world.

Parallel with this trend is an increasingly symbiotic relationship between local governments and local partners—nonprofit organizations, neighborhood associations, community development corporations, and other institutions—in delivering needed services to the communities and regions in which they are located. Greater connectivity leads to greater awareness of needs, which, if properly cultivated, can result in more social capital invested by individual and organizational nongovernmental stakeholders. And as local governments have looked for innovative ways to maintain service levels in an era of reduced resources, formal and informal partnerships have become increasingly popular approaches for ensuring community and social vibrancy.

Dubuque's passion for partnerships has flourished over the last 20 years. The city's transformative efforts have involved partnerships with key local institutions such as the Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce and the CFGD. The power of partnerships in Dubuque has run parallel with the city's commitment to engage residents as well as with its effort to leverage resources from state, regional, national, and even international sources.

Smarter Sustainable Dubuque Partnership

Dubuque has gained much international prestige from its partnership with IBM on the Smarter Sustainable Dubuque effort. The program has used smarter metering technology in several areas, including water and electricity. Importantly, several of the pilot projects of the partnership have operated with a firm commitment to all three legs of the sustainability stool: environment, economy, and social equity. For example, the smarter water pilot project developed a cost-share program to help residents fix leaks that had been identified through participation in the program.

A key finding of the partnership is that there are pockets of residents—the elderly, for example—who are not comfortable with using online technologies even though they may have wanted to participate in the program. As a result, the partnership developed in-person forums and also trained public library employees to help participants fully engage in the pilot.

Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque

In places where they operate, community foundations can be powerful catalysts for new ideas and approaches for such endeavors as creating more sustainable and livable places. Historically, the first community foundation was the Cleveland Foundation in 1914. Now community foundations exist in hundreds of communities around the United States, with the largest found in major metropolitan areas such as New York, Boston, and Chicago; regional or statewide entities include the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the Foundation for the Carolinas.

One of the strongest partners in Dubuque's sustainability efforts has been the CFGD. Founded in 2001, Dubuque's community foundation is a relative newcomer, considering the 100-year history of similar organizations, yet it has been integral in convening, funding, and partnering with a variety of efforts:

- Project HOPE, a workforce development and educational attainment initiative, involves a network of organizations, including the city, the regional council of governments, the local development corporation, and city schools. Its purpose is to provide local residents with life skills, employment opportunities, and training opportunities.
- The Dubuque Green and Healthy Homes Initiative connects low- to moderate-income homeowners with resources and information on lead hazards, weatherization, and other topics.

The CFGD has also been a major supporter of programming and initiatives focused on the region's young people.

Because the city has creatively addressed many of the challenges that partnerships have traditionally faced, such as trust, control, and funding, there is an ongoing willingness among individuals, nonprofits, the business community, and other stakeholders in Dubuque to engage in the codelivery of programs, projects, and initiatives that are designed to make a more livable and sustainable community. This willingness to engage should be considered a prerequisite for all successful partnerships, and several factors are likely to precondition the participation of potential partners. According to the findings from *Beyond Citizen Engagement*, attitudes about partnering to deliver needed services are generally positive if certain variables are evident, such as impacts on the immediate environment (local government, neighborhood, jurisdiction). Importantly, citizens and participating groups want to make sure that their involvement in a project is actually making a difference.¹⁰

There appear to be several other reasons why Dubuque is so successful at developing partnerships. First, Dubuque is a modestly sized city of 58,000 with an appropriately sized government delivering a typical suite of public services. Partnership in service delivery, particularly as it affects community

development, maximizes economies of scale, and in Dubuque, equity shares of sustainability initiatives are spread out among local government, private organizations, and nonprofit, which is exceptionally important as local government financial resources are increasingly constrained.

Second, there are nongovernmental organizations in Dubuque that willingly contribute financial and other resources to support partnership-based efforts. The CFGD and the Greater Dubuque Development Corporation, for example, have both been substantial supporters of efforts in areas such as workforce development, economic development, youth services, education, and more.

Third, and probably most important, public participation has been actively cultivated. The planning processes that started after the economic collapse of the local economy in the 1980s have built up the willingness to engage citizens in the quest for solutions. The power of civic engagement as a precursor to effective partnerships is notably evident in Dubuque’s continued success.

FINDING 4 – Creating more sustainable communities for the next generation is critical.

Craig Malin, a veteran city manager, has argued passionately that the Athenian Oath to “transmit this city, not only less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us” should be taken literally by the city management profession.

Our profession comes with an obligation to truly, transformatively transmit the communities of which we are the stewards to a higher purpose. For clarity about why we are obliged to transmit our community, my suggestion is to visit a park, a school, or a juvenile detention center.

We work for kids.

[And] while we respect and honor the past, we work for the future. Managers work for the next generation.¹¹

The city and community of Dubuque have developed numerous programs and partnerships focused on the next generation, many of which are supported by key institutional partners such as the CFGD. Several of these programs include a campaign to improve grade-level reading scores, often a predictor of future success in adulthood.

Every Child/Every Promise

One such program is Every Child Every Promise, described as a strategic alliance facilitated by Dubuque’s community foundation in partnership with two dozen local youth-serving agencies, organizations, and programs. The purpose of the program is “to promote collaboration among youth-serving agencies, eliminate duplication of services, gather effective data,” and focus on the

DUBUQUE SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLE—COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE

Dubuque is a community that values education, empowerment, and engagement to achieve economic prosperity, environmental integrity, and social/cultural vibrancy

five promises—key support structures—for youth development: caring adults, safe environments, good health, education, and opportunities to serve.¹²

The Every Child Every Promise program has developed several strategies to help guide the initiative. As the effort rolled out in 2006, several events were organized to better understand the service gaps and overlaps for Dubuque’s youth. From this work and other activities, a strategic plan was created that laid out a roadmap for how the community could work more effectively to support its youth. Shortly thereafter, work began on an effort to identify and measure indicators of impact in the community. Indicators for each of the five promises were developed, and initial assessments conducted. Additionally, each measure was assessed as being a promise kept, holding steady, or broken. In 2011 the first *Youth Indicator Report* was published.¹³

The measures for each of the five promises are outlined below.

Caring Adults: *All young people need and deserve support and guidance from caring adults. This includes ongoing, secure relationships with guardians, parents, and other family members, as well as positive relationships with teachers, mentors, coaches, and neighbors. Indicators are*

- Child abuse/neglect cases
- Investigated reports of domestic violence
- Adult alcohol/substance abuse based on surveys of youth
- Divorce rates
- Licensed quality child care facilities
- Children read to by parents
- Mother’s educational attainment
- Unemployment rate
- Adult-to-student mentoring relationships.

Safe Places: *All young people need and deserve to be physically and emotionally safe wherever they are—at home, in schools, in their neighborhoods, in their communities, and online. Indicators are*

- Crime rate
- Juvenile crime rate
- Homeless youth
- Child poverty rate
- Youth perception of community as a safe place
- Youth perception of school as a safe place
- Reported bullying/harassment or discrimination
- Before- and after-school programs.

Opportunities to Serve: *Every child in Dubuque will have the opportunity to serve by making a difference in the community and helping others. Indicators are*

- Youth who support volunteerism
- Youth engaged in contributing to community.

Healthy Starts: *All young people need healthy bodies, healthy minds, and healthful habits, which result from regular health care and needed treatment, good nutrition and exercise, health education, and healthy role models.*

Indicators are

- Low birthweight
- Incidence of prematurity
- Appropriate prenatal care
- Infant mortality
- Teen birth rate
- Age-appropriate immunizations
- Child health insurance
- Youth reported substance abuse
- Youth reported contemplation of suicide
- Lead poisoning.

Effective Education: *All young people need and deserve the intellectual development, motivation, and marketable skills that equip them for successful work and lifelong training. These result from having quality learning environments, challenging expectations, and consistent guidance and mentoring. Indicators are*

- Students changing schools for other than graded promotion
- Graduation rate
- ACT scores
- Percentage of schools with business partnerships
- Students attending post-secondary education
- Free or reduced lunch recipients.

Housing Education and Rehabilitation Training (HEART)

One of the more innovative and inspiring partnerships involves a local nonprofit, the city, and the local school district engaging at-risk youth in the restoration of housing in a low-income neighborhood. The HEART Program—Housing Education and Rehabilitation Training Program was launched in 2000 by the Four Mounds Foundation, a local nonprofit organization that provides community and youth education, recreation, and training based out of an estate willed to the city in the early 1980s. Participants are typically marginalized students who have not been successful in traditional school settings. However, through the HEART Program, they learn restoration skills while reengaging with high school studies in order to earn a high school diploma. Since the program started, its participants have converted more than 30 properties into single-family homes.

The HEART Program intersects with the city’s sustainability commitment by

- Promoting reuse of existing properties and facilities
- Removing of blighted properties
- Restoring historic properties and neighborhoods

- Providing higher-quality affordable housing
- Helping young people connect to education, skills, and green-collar jobs.

Importantly, the HEART Program is one example of Dubuque's commitment to economic advancement of all through education, workforce development, and other strategies to increase the living standards of all residents.

FINDING 5 – Community sustainability is closely related to workforce development and economic stability among the most vulnerable populations.

Dubuque has made great strides to recover from the staggering 23 percent unemployment level of the 1980s. However, city and community leaders and partnering organizations, as well as economic development experts, recognize that economic and workforce sustainability requires continuous effort, nurturing, and creativity to produce a workforce that is capable of meeting the needs of existing employers as well as those that may come to the community in the future. Thus, in recent years, Dubuque has implemented numerous public-private efforts targeting low- and moderate-income families, under- and unemployed workers, and high school dropouts:

- Since 2008, Project H.O.P.E (Helping Our People Excel) has engaged eight local partnering groups from government agencies, the business and education communities, and local philanthropy to improve the services and programming designed to provide disenfranchised youth with education, skills training, and employment opportunities.
- Dubuque Circles Initiative, based on a national network of circles programs, trains volunteers to help lower-income families with life planning lessons, including strategies for higher-level employment opportunities. A companion program, Bridges out of Poverty, trains middle- and upper-income individuals in strategies to support their lower-income neighbors.
- Opportunity Dubuque is a workforce training program that connects underemployed residents with the skill sets they need to succeed in higher-wage sectors clustered in the region. The program engages about a dozen local private sector groups and a similar number of community groups to prepare workers for manufacturing, information technology, and health care jobs in the greater regional economy.

Dubuque has learned from its past. In 1982, almost one-quarter of all local workers were employed by a couple of major manufacturing entities, and when one closed and the other downsized at almost the same time, unemployment skyrocketed, leaving the city's and the region's economies in desperate straits. The Greater Dubuque Development Corporation was founded in 1984 after community leaders decided that a new organization was needed to help the city climb out of its economic hole. And even though today's economy is a relatively robust one, there is a continuous effort to connect workforce and economic development with the city's sustainability efforts.

FINDING 6 – Community and social vibrancy in Dubuque proceeds in step with economic advancement and redevelopment that build on the region’s past.

While Dubuque’s economic decline was sudden and dramatic, nowhere was it more evident than along the city’s Mississippi River waterfront. Over the last 20 years, significant public and private investments have been made, and several sustainable growth plans for key areas of the city have been created to help guide economic advancement, redevelopment, and neighborhood revitalization in Dubuque. Examples include the following:

- **Dubuque Comprehensive Plan.** The modern version of Dubuque’s master plan was adopted in 1995 following early civic engagement in the city’s Vision 2000 process. The plan is updated every five years, focusing on the physical, economic, and social environment of the city and region.
- **Downtown Master Plan.** This plan guides the vision for how to maintain downtown Dubuque’s unique character through stakeholder engagement, steady investment and reinvestment, and maintenance of the area’s continued vibrancy.
- **Port of Dubuque Master Plan.** The result of nearly a year-long community involvement process, this plan guides the redevelopment of Dubuque’s Mississippi River waterfront into an area where work, play, and recreation all happen in a sustainable fashion.
- **Washington Neighborhood Master Plan.** Focusing on one of Dubuque’s low-income parts of town, the plan is helping to redefine the trajectory of the Washington Neighborhood through 68 interconnected recommendations focused on economic and community development, youth and family issues, and housing.
- **Historic Millwork District Master Plan.** As noted below, the plan for the Historic Millwork District is guiding the revitalization of Dubuque’s former center of commerce into a mixed-use neighborhood that illustrates the triple principles of sustainability.

The first signature project was the first phase of redevelopment along the waterfront, now called the Port of Dubuque. This phase, which began in the 1990s with the construction of a river museum and aquarium, resulted in the planning and implementation of the \$188 million American’s River Project. Renovation of a 90-acre area was complete in 2003, and the park, which features an amphitheater, plaza, and river museum and connects to 35 miles of trail, increased tourism spending by \$18 million in its first two years alone. The second phase of investment involved the addition of a convention center, research center, and theater. The redevelopment project, which has resulted in a dramatic increase in downtown construction and a net gain in jobs, was the result of a partnership between the City of Dubuque, the Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce, Dubuque County, the Dubuque County Historical Society, State of Iowa Vision Iowa Fund, and the Platinum Hospitality Group.^{14 15}

Located close to downtown Dubuque, the Port of Dubuque area, and the lower-income Washington Neighborhood, the Historic Millwork District is a collection of more than two dozen warehouse buildings that are in various stages of abandonment and neglect. Once a thriving business center of Dubuque, the Millwork District fell into disrepair and became a multi-acre eyesore in need of

redevelopment. After it was selected as one of the ten Envision 2010 projects to pursue, the city and its local partners began planning for the Historic Millwork District's sustainable redevelopment.¹⁶ In 2007 the city council adopted a revitalization strategy, and a number of studies followed, including a master plan, market analysis, and energy analysis. Key funding, including a U.S. Department of Transportation Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant was secured to help complete the needed streetwork, including reconstruction of underground utilities, permeable pavement, curb cutouts, and energy-efficient and historically designed streetlighting.

An Iowa Great Places grant added artistic elements to the streetscaping of the Historic Millwork District, including sidewalk medallions, benches, sewer lids, planters, and waste receptacles, which were mostly designed and produced by local artists and manufacturers. Additionally, the National Endowment for the Arts "Our Town" program helped pay for artistic streetscapes, placed-based arts, and cultural planning efforts in the District. By 2012 the streetscape was largely completed. Similarly reconstruction of the CARADCO building, one of the largest warehouses in the District, had already been completed, and tenants were beginning to occupy portions of the building.

So why is economic redevelopment a key feature of community and social vibrancy in Dubuque? For starters, it is hard for social equity programming and policies to gain a foothold in times of economic stagnation. Blighted unoccupied real estate is not only an eyesore for the community but also a drag on local resources, including revenues and potential expenses for needed safety and security measures.

Second, projects such as the Historic Millwork District revitalization effort help reconnect the present to the region's decorated past. The District is a model template of complete streets and innovative streetscape design that recreates a historic and culturally interesting sense of place in a part of town that for years had been on a downward slope. This inviting re-creation of a community is attracting businesses, residents, and nonprofit organizations to locate in the area.

By reusing existing land, buildings, materials, infrastructure, and design features, historic redevelopment helps foster a sense of community as much as it can help bring jobs, housing, commerce, and recreation back into existing neighborhoods.

List of Study Participants

The author of this report conducted interviews with 10 individuals familiar with social equity-related issues in Dubuque, Iowa. The author wishes to thank the following individuals for their contributions:

- Mike Van Milligen, city manager, City of Dubuque
- Cindy Steinhauer, assistant city manager, City of Dubuque
- Terri Goodman, assistant city manager, City of Dubuque
- Cori Burbach, sustainable community coordinator, City of Dubuque
- Kelly Larson, human rights director, City of Dubuque

- Rick Dickinson, president and CEO, Greater Dubuque Development Corporation
- Nikola Pavelic, community engagement coordinator, City of Dubuque
- Nancy Van Milligen, president and CEO, Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque
- Eric Dregne, vice president of strategic initiatives, Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque
- Abini El Amin, Executive Director, Multicultural Family Center

Endnotes

- ¹ Cori Burbach, *Sustainable Dubuque: Creating a National Model for Sustainability* (2013), 2, <http://www.cityofdubuque.org/DocumentCenter/Home/View/2702>.
- ² *Ibid.*, 5.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁴ City of Dubuque website, “About Sustainable Dubuque” (n.d.), <http://www.cityofdubuque.org/index.aspx?NID=1257>.
- ⁵ ICMA webinar, “Economic Development: Branding Your Community” (May 2, 2013), <http://learning.icma.org/store/seminar/seminar.php?seminar=18243>.
- ⁶ *Envision: 10 Community Projects by 2010*. http://www.cfleads.org/resources/webinars/2011_webinar6/tools/Envision2010.pdf
- ⁷ Interview with Cindy Steinhauer, assistant city manager, Dubuque, Iowa.
- ⁸ Joel Mills, “The Civics of Sustainability, An Overview,” *National Civic Review* 99, no. 3 (2010): 5, <http://www.ncl.org/pdfs/99-3/MillsCivicsustainability.pdf>.
- ⁹ A “prevailing” practice (versus a “leading” or “emerging” practice) is one that has been proven useful and not considered to be risky. A local government might need to make changes in order to adopt, so it might not be considered an industry standard. For an in-depth discussion of emerging, leading, and prevailing practices in the United State, see ICMA’s 2014 Municipal Year Book in Chapter 7 entitled “Spreading Innovation.”
- ¹⁰ P. K. Kannan and Ai-Mei Chang, *Beyond Citizen Engagement: Involving the Public in Co-Delivering Government Services* (Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2013), <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/Beyond%20Citizen%20Engagement.pdf>.
- ¹¹ Craig Malin, “Next Generation Sustainability.” *Public Management (PM)* 94 (June 2012): 28–29, <http://community-wealth.org/sites/clone.community-wealth.org/files/downloads/article-malin.pdf>.
- ¹² Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, *Inspiration to Impact! 2013 Annual Report* (2013), 21, http://www.dbqfoundation.org/sites/default/files/reports/final_annual_report_web_res_0.pdf.
- ¹³ *Every Child/Every Promise, Dubuque County Youth Indicator Report* (2011), http://www.everychild-everypromise.org/indicator_report.html.
- ¹⁴ Jean Tarbett Hardiman, “Riverfront Development Success Means Big Changes for Dubuque,” *Herald-Dispatch* (Huntington), July 22, 2007, <http://www.urbanplanet.org/forums/index.php/topic/40526-iowa-dubuque-riverfront-development-success-means-big-changes/>.
- ¹⁵ America’s River website, “America’s River Project Overview” (n.d.), <http://www.americasriver.com/overview.htm>.
- ¹⁶ City of Dubuque website, “Historic Millwork District Revitalization” (n.d.), <https://ia-dubuque.civicplus.com/index.aspx?NID=116>.

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