

Sustainable Development and U.N. Agenda 21

Economic Development or Economic Destruction?

Sedgwick County Commissioner Richard Ranzau

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This paper provides a basic understanding of the relationship between UN Agenda 21 and the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants. It also provides numerous links and additional resources that the reader may utilize to enhance his/her understanding of this issue. The author may be contacted at rranzau@sedgwick.gov.

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Sustainable Development

On November 21, 2011, the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs (HUD) [announced](#) the [Regional Economic Area Partnership \(REAP\)](#) and the [Flint Hills Regional Council \(FHRC\)](#) as recipients of the 2011 Sustainable Communities Grants. These grants are a result of a partnership between HUD, the Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that was created on June 16, 2009, five months after President Obama took office. These planning grants are designed to help local communities to adopt "[sustainable development](#)" policies (also known as [Smart Growth](#)). Proponents of these grants tell us this program will help lower the cost of future development and promote economic development.

But is this actually true? And what are they not telling us?

Proponents of these grants often speak in general terms that make it difficult to disagree. But as they say, the devil is in the details. It is very important for you to know what they are not telling you. We all need to look beyond the fancy talk and find out what the agenda is really about.

The term "[sustainable development](#)" was first used in a [1987 United Nations report](#) and subsequently transformed into a political agenda by the United Nations initiative called [Agenda 21](#). The words of Maurice Strong, Secretary General, UN Conference on Environment and Development, 1992 (also known as the Rio Earth Summit, where Agenda 21 was unveiled) give us insight as to the target of this initiative:

"...current lifestyles and consumption patterns of the affluent middle class - involving high meat intake, use of fossil fuels, appliances, home and work air conditioning, and suburban housing are not sustainable."

The intent of this paper is to share information and insight about "[sustainable development](#)" so that citizens and elected officials can have a more complete understanding of what the planning grants will entail and what possible consequences our communities may face if these policies are implemented.

There is a lot of information available on the internet so it will not all be repeated in this paper. Links have been provided to a variety of resources for you to educate yourself, and others, on this issue. That being said, it is not possible for everyone to read every link. So, if you are pressed for time, read these first:

- [The Folly of Smart Growth](#)
- [Big Burdens from Growth Management](#)
- [Heritage Foundation Article](#)
- [Understanding Sustainable Development](#)

Unfortunately, most elected officials have no knowledge of the history, intent, or consequences of "[sustainable development](#)" policies. Certainly, citizens of the regions have no idea that unelected regional bodies are about to develop a plan for their future based upon the [Smart Growth](#) agenda.

It is important to understand that "sustainable development" encompasses a wide range of policy issues and can be implemented in a variety of ways. [Agenda 21](#) and these planning grants are just two of the tools being used to implement these policies. [Smart Growth](#) and [Livable \(or Sustainable\) Communities](#) are also terms that are closely related. While [Agenda 21](#), "[sustainable](#)

[development](#)", [Smart Growth](#), and [Livable Communities](#) are not necessarily synonyms, they are closely related and are often used interchangeably. Citizens and elected officials must be aware that these policies will continue to present themselves in a variety of ways. A healthy skepticism and a mindful eye, regardless of the source, are crucial to avoiding implementation of the agenda and its harmful consequences.

One of the most important reasons to be concerned about the agenda behind these grants is the effect it could have on housing costs and property rights. Smart Growth supporters decry suburban development (single family home with a yard) as unsustainable and work to push people into high density housing (and government transportation). They do this by using local zoning codes to prevent more suburban development. The [Notice of Funding Availability \(NOFA\)](#) for this grant clearly states that one of their desires is to implement policy via local zoning codes and land use regulations.

However, a [recent article](#) published by the Heritage Foundation points out the negative consequences that Smart Growth proponents will not tell you:

“Among other priorities, smart-growth policies impose land use regulations that suppress housing supply and drive up home prices, in turn imposing unnecessary costs, especially on middle- and lower-income households. These policies contributed to and aggravate the real estate bubble by putting inflationary pressures on housing prices.”

Other communities that have instituted Smart Growth policies have seen a significant increase in housing costs and have created a substantial [planning tax](#). Do we need that in our communities?

Another troublesome aspect of this grant program is more EPA involvement in local communities. While supporters of this grant program may avoid or downplay any discussion of this fact, the [NOFA](#) says these grants will be used to address climate change and environmental impact and the head of EPA, Lisa P. Jackson, has clearly stated:

“This partnership provides a framework to guide decisions that affect all communities.”

Do we want the EPA to provide a framework to guide our decisions? We are already suffering the consequences (increased development costs) of EPA involvement in our communities as a result of storm water drainage regulations and we are facing the possibility of additional burdens because of excessive ozone regulation.

Additionally, the EPA established an Environmental Finance Center in the Hugo Wall School of Urban and Public Affairs (HWS) in 2009 and is listed as a partner and resource for this grant. (Interestingly, REAP is also located in the HWS.) Why would we want to participate in a planning program that would lead to more costly environmental regulations?

Proponents of this grant contend that it will help with economic development. But, how can increased housing costs and EPA regulations help economic development? Obviously, it cannot and will not. Once again, the [Heritage Foundation](#) explains the reality of the situation:

“Agenda 21 and similar-smart growth policies greatly extend the government’s regulatory reach and impede economic growth, construction, consumer choice, homeownership, job creation, and flexible community development strategies.”

While the supporters of these grants may have good intentions, the possible consequences of any plans developed as a result of these grants are too important and troublesome to ignore. If you are a builder, developer, current or future home buyer, farmer, property or business owner, you need to educate yourself on this issue.

If you are concerned about the consequences that local land use zoning codes and government regulations (think EPA) may have on your life, then you need to be very concerned.

Take the time to educate yourself. And then educate your elected officials and tell them to stop this "trojan horse" from entering our communities before it is too late.

If you are an elected official, please consider the unintended consequences and separate your desire to support REAP or the FHRC from this particular grant. Opposing this grant program and its agenda does not mean that you don't support your regional body. It just means that you are willing to put the long term interests of your community first.

U.N. Agenda 21 and Sustainable Planning Timeline

- 1983 The [Brundtland Commission](#) (formerly known as the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development) was convened by the UN.
- 1987 The [Brundtland Commission](#) published a report entitled *Our Common Future*. This report first defined “[Sustainable Development](#)” (See Part I, Chapter 2) and led to the first earth summit and to the creation of [UN Agenda 21](#).
- 1992 Agenda 21 unveiled during United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, commonly known as [Rio Earth Summit](#). More than 178 nations adopted Agenda 21, including President George H.W. Bush for the United States.
- 1992 Nancy Pelosi [submits](#) resolution ([H.Con. Res 353](#)) to implement Agenda 21. The bill passed the House but failed in the Senate.
- 1993 Nancy Pelosi [submits](#) resolution ([H.J. Res 166](#)) to implement Agenda 21. The bill stalled in the Subcommittee on Economic Policy, Trade and Environment.
- 1993 President Bill Clinton established the [President’s Council on Sustainable Development](#) by executive order after Pelosi’s efforts fail.
- 2009 President Obama assumes office
- 2009 President Obama [creates partnership](#) between HUD, DOT, and EPA to promote the [Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants](#).
- 2009 The [EPA establishes](#) an [Environmental Finance Center](#) within the Hugo Wall School of Urban Affairs at Wichita State University.
- 2010 The [Regional Economic Area Partnership \(REAP\)](#) applies for first HUD grant and is not selected. Sedgwick County elected to NOT participate in the application by a 3-2 vote.
- 2011 REAP produces PowerPoint presentation on [Regional Sustainability Planning](#) that uses that same definition of “sustainable development” as the Brundtland Commission. (See slide 13)
- 2011 [REAP applies for HUD grant](#) again and is selected. Sedgwick County elected to participate in the application by a 3-2 vote. The [Flint Hills Regional Council](#) is also selected for a grant.
- 2012 REAP will hire two full-time personnel to facilitate the creation of the plan. They will be employed by the Hugo Wall School of Urban Affairs.
- 2015 Once the plan is complete, the region will then be eligible for implementation grants. Implementation of increased land use regulations and other government directed restrictions will lead to an increase in housing and development costs for everyone.

“Sustainable Planning” Not So Sustainable

by Randal O’Toole, Cato Institute

The vast majority of Americans, surveys say, aspire to live in a single-family home with a yard. The vast majority of American travel—around 85 percent—is by automobile. Yet the Obama administration thinks more Americans should live in apartments and travel on foot, bicycle, or mass transit.

To promote this idea, the administration wants to give the south central Kansas Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP) the opportunity to apply for a \$1.5 million grant to participate in “sustainable communities.” Also sometimes called “smart growth,” the ideas promoted by these programs are anything but sustainable or smart. (As members of REAP, the governing bodies for both Wichita and Sedgwick County endorsed this grant.)

The urban plans that come out of these kinds of programs typically call for:

- Redesigning streets to increase traffic congestion in order to discourage people from driving;
- Increasing subsidies to transit, bike paths, and other “alternative” forms of travel even though these alternatives are used by few people;
- Denying owners of land on the urban fringes the right to develop their property in order to make single-family housing more expensive;
- Subsidizing high-density, developments that combine housing with retail shops in the hope that people will walk to shopping rather than drive;
- Rezoning neighborhoods of single-family homes for apartments with zoning so strict that, if someone’s house burns down, they will have to replace it with an apartment.

My former hometown of Portland, Oregon has followed these policies for two decades, and the results have been a disaster. In their zeal to subsidize transit and high-density developments, the region’s officials have taken money from schools, libraries, fire, and police, leaving those programs starved and in disarray.

Since 1980, Portland has spent more than \$3 billion building light-rail lines. Far from improving transit, the share of commuters taking transit to work has fallen from 9.8 percent in 1980 to 7.5 percent today, mainly because the region cut bus service to pay for the trains. Traffic congestion quadrupled between 1984 and 2004, which planners say was necessary to get people to ride transit.

The region’s housing policies made single-family homes so expensive that most families with children moved to distant suburbs where they can afford a house with a yard. Residents of subsidized high-density housing projects drive just about as much as anyone else in the Portland area, and developers have learned to their sorrow that if they follow planners’ guidelines in providing less parking for these projects, they will end up with high vacancy rates.

Despite these problems, Portland has received lots of positive publicity. The reason for this is simple: by forcing out families with children, inner Portland is left mainly with young singles and childless couples who eat out a lot, making Portland a Mecca for tourists who like exciting new restaurants. This makes Portland a great place to visit, but you wouldn’t want to live there unless you like noisy, congested streets.

The idea of “sustainable communities” is that planners can socially engineer people into changing their travel behavior by redesigning cities to favor pedestrians and transit over automobiles. Beyond the fact that this is an outrageous intrusion of government into people’s lives, it simply doesn’t work. Such experts as University of California economist David Brownstone and University of Southern California planning professor Genevieve Giuliano have shown that the link between urban design and driving is too weak to make a difference.

To protect livability and avoid unsustainable subsidies to transit and high-density development, Wichita, Sedgwick County, and other REAP members of south central Kansas should reject the \$1.5 million grant offered by the federal government.

Randal O’Toole (rot@cato.org) is a senior fellow with the Cato Institute and author of The Best-Laid Plans: How Government Planning Harms Your Quality Life, Your Pocketbook, and Your Future.

[Note: This was published in the Wichita Eagle on October 30, 2011. See: <http://www.kansas.com/2011/10/30/2083141/sustainable-planning-is-not-so.html>]

Additional Resources

Readers of this paper are encouraged to educate themselves on this very important issue. Links to additional resources that will facilitate an enhanced understanding of “sustainable development” and its consequences have been included.

Recent Articles

[EPA Ponders Expanded Regulatory Power In Name of ‘Sustainable Development’](http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/12/19/epa-ponders-expanded-regulatory-power-in-name-sustainable-development/)

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/12/19/epa-ponders-expanded-regulatory-power-in-name-sustainable-development/>

The EPA spent nearly \$700,000 on a study entitled “Sustainability and the U.S. EPA”. They want to integrate sustainability “as one of the key drivers within the regulatory responsibilities of EPA.”

[Focus on Agenda 21 Should Not Divert Attention from Homegrown Anti-Growth Policies](http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/bg2628.pdf)

http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/bg2628.pdf

This article points out that Agenda 21 is only one part of the effort to implement economically destructive smart-growth programs.

[What’s with Newt Gingrich and Agenda 21?](http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2011/11/18/whats-with-newt-gingrich-and-agenda-21/)

<http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2011/11/18/whats-with-newt-gingrich-and-agenda-21/>

This is an article about Newt Gingrich’s reference to Agenda 21 in one of the republican debates.

What You Aren't Being Told

[Understanding Sustainable Development](http://www.middletonca.com/UNDERSTANDING-AGENDA21.pdf)

<http://www.middletonca.com/UNDERSTANDING-AGENDA21.pdf>

This is a MUST READ for those who want to fully understand the issue at hand.

[Big Burdens from Growth Management](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=9701)

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=9701

Growth management planning is touted as way to address the "problem" of urban sprawl and to encourage "Smart Growth". But what are the consequences of these planning techniques?

[The Folly of Smart Growth](http://www.cato.org/pubs/regulation/regv24n3/otoole.pdf)

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/regulation/regv24n3/otoole.pdf>

Despite proponents assertion to the contrary, "anti-sprawl" strategies aren't as benign as they would lead us to believe. Shouldn't we learn from the mistakes of others?

[The Planning Tax: The Case against Regional Growth-Management Planning](http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-606.pdf)

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-606.pdf>

Before engaging in any growth management planning, everyone should understand how it will dramatically effect (increase) housing costs.

[Critiquing Sprawl's Critics](#)

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa365.pdf>

Is it really a problem that people want to live in the suburbs?

[Sustainable Development: A Dubious Solution in Search of a Problem](#)

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa449.pdf>

What problem are we trying to fix with these planning grants? Do we even have a problem?

UN Agenda 21 Information

[UN Agenda 21](#)

<http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/>

This is the United Nations website for Agenda 21.

[Our Common Future](#)

<http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>

The definition of "Sustainable Development" that is used by both the United Nations and REAP is found at the beginning of [Chapter 2](#).

U.S. Government Websites

[Partnership of Sustainable Communities Website](#)

<http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/index.html>

This is the website explaining the partnership that HUD, DOT, and EPA have created to promote sustainable development. This partnership was announced on June 16, 2009, five months after President Obama took office.

[Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants](#)

http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities/sustainable_communities_regional_planning_grants

This is the HUD website that promotes the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants.

[HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities](#)

<http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/partnership/index.html>

This is the EPA website for the Partnership for Sustainable Communities. It is part of their "Smart Growth" policy.

REAP Planning Grant Information

[Cooperative Agreement](#)

http://www.reap-ks.org/images/content/files/fy11_terms_and_conditions.pdf

Here is the agreement between HUD and REAP. Pay close attention to item 25 “HUD’s Substantial Involvement”.

[REAP Proposal Narrative](#)

http://www.reap-ks.org/images/content/files/reap_exhibit_one.pdf

[Rating Factor Forms](#)

http://www.reap-ks.org/images/content/files/reap_exhibit_two.pdf

[FY2011 Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant NOFA](#)

<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=2011scrpgfullappnofa.pdf>

This document identifies the objectives of the HUD Grants and the criteria for selection

[REAP Regional Sustainability Planning Presentation](#)

<http://www.reap-ks.org/images/content/files/Sustainability%20Presentation.pdf>

This a pdf file of the PowerPoint presentation given by REAP staff on September 12, 2011.

Contact Information

Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP)

REAP Chairman

Mayor Kristey Williams, City of Augusta: kristeywilliams@yahoo.com

REAP Chief Executive Officer

Joe Yager: joe.yager@wichita.edu

Sedgwick County Commission

Dave Unruh: dunruh@sedgwick.gov

Tim Norton: tnorton@sedgwick.gov

Karl Peterjohn: kpeterjo@sedgwick.gov

Richard Ranzau: rranzau@sedgwick.gov

Jim Skelton: jskelton@sedgwick.gov

City of Wichita

Mayor Carl Brewer: CBrewer@wichita.gov

James Clendenin: jclendenin@wichita.gov;

Jeff Longwell: jlongwell@wichita.gov

Michael O'Donnell: modonnell@wichita.gov;

Pete Meitzner: pmeitzner@wichita.gov;

Lavonta Williams: LKWilliams@wichita.gov

Janet Miller: JLMiller@wichita.gov

Reno County Commission

Dan Deming: dan.deming@renogov.org

James Schlickau: james.schlickau@renogov.org

Brad Dillon: bdillon@gh-hutch.com

City of Hutchinson

Ron Sellers: rons@hutchgov.com
David Razo: djrazo@wildflower.net
Bob Bush: bobb@hutchgov.com
Cindy Proett: cindyp@hutchgov.com
Dean Brigman: deanb@hutchgov.com

Butler County Commission

Jeff Masterson: Commissionerjeff@cox.net
Peggy Palmer: Reppalmer@aol.com
Bruce Harris: bharris@bucoks.com
Mike Wheeler: mwheeler@bucoks.com
Dan Woydziak: dwoydzia@bucoks.com

City of El Dorado

Mayor Tom McKibban: mayormckibban@eldoks.com
Nick Badway: nbadwey@cox.net
David Chapin: flyboy958@hotmail.com
Shane Krause: skrause2@cox.net
Bill Young: commissioner.young@cox.net

Harvey County Commission

George "Chip" Westphal: chipw58@cox.net
Marge Roberson: margeroberson@sbcglobal.net
Ron Krehbiel: creimer@harveycounty.com

City of Newton

Mayor Kenneth Hall: khall@newtonkansas.com
Racquel Thiesen: rthiesen@newtonkansas.com
Glen Davis: Glendavis3@cox.net
Willis Heck: wheck@newtonkansas.com
James Nickel: jnickel@newtonkansas.com

Sumner County Commission

Steve Warner: sucoclk@co.sumner.ks.us
Cliff Bales: sucoclk@co.sumner.ks.us
Jim Newell: sucoclk@co.sumner.ks.us

City of Wellington

Mayor Roger Stallbaumer: stallbaumer@cityofwellington.net

Kim Woodrow: shootist@sutv.com

John Brand: brand@cityofwellington.net

Dana Anderson: dana.anderson@primevest.com

Chase Weber: weber@cityofwellington.net

John Tracy: bjtracy@sbcglobal.net

Larry Shimer: shimer@cityofwellington.net

Paula Mortimer: mortimer@cityofwellington.net

Terry Nunemaker: nunemaker@cityofwellington.net