

# PRAIRIE FLYER

Newsletter of the Sierra Club Prairie Group ■ East-Central Illinois ■

## City of Urbana Hosts Sustainability Forum

By Kirstin Replogle

A packed house greeted Mayor Laurel Prussing at Urbana's "Sustainability: What You Can Do" forum on Wednesday, February 27th.

This was the first public event to discuss the City's efforts towards building a more sustainable community, and gave people a chance to ask questions and help the city prioritize the parts of the plan.

The Urbana Sustainability Plan is a long-range, comprehensive plan for the City of Urbana to reduce not only the environmental impact of municipal buildings and services, but to reduce the entire community's impact on the environment.

The plan consists of looking at government buildings, municipal services, and operational functions. Urbana is reassessing everything from energy efficient designs for new buildings, to when to turn off office computers. The City will also purchase increasingly energy efficient fleet vehicles, plan land development that promotes open spaces, increased use of public transportation, all municipal activities from land use, building codes, city property utilization, procurement, water use, and transportation infrastructure will be under review. Waste and recycling efforts, where Urbana already excels, will be redoubled with a big objective of zero waste by 2020.



### SUSTAINABLE URBANA

A place to Work, Live,  
and Grow

A major component of the plan is education to promote environmental awareness among the citizens in reducing environmental impact; after all, municipal services and activities are a small percentage in comparison to the environmental impact of the citizens. Education was the purpose of the public sustainability forum in the city council chambers.

The first speaker was Leslie Cooperband, an extension specialist at the University of Illinois. Leslie talked about the importance of local food systems, which includes food production, processing, and distribution. Many people would be surprised to learn that on average from farm to plate, the food we eat travels between 1500-2500 miles! Even most of the food consumed in the Midwest - with it's agricultural economy - is actually imported. Taking into consideration all of the miles traveled, a locally based food system emits 5-17 times less CO<sub>2</sub> than the industrial food system.

"Local" can mean different things to different people and different sized communities. For example, Chicago would have to consider a several state area as its local food source due to the population, but a reasonable definition of "local" for Urbana and other cities of this size in our region is a 50-80 mile radius from our community.

Other sustainable benefits to a local food system include a more stable and decentralized economic base, and producers are more likely to adopt environmentally responsible practices than larger farms that sell one or two products to a large, centralized buyer.

Excellent information on local food systems can be found at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, at Iowa State University ([www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu)).

The evening's second speaker was John Marlin of the Illinois Waste Management and Research Center. John spoke from the heart about how our connection to nature is being lost through a disposable society.

Our connection to nature is being lost.

He showed a picture of "spring beauty" flowers - a small, white carpet of flowers that supports 57 of our 299 native bee species. In this day when the nation's honeybee populations, mostly a hybrid not native to the U.S., are plummeting for unknown reasons, we must do all we can to support and encourage our native bee species. Yet one application of a herbicide could destroy that yard of attractive flowers because people prefer manicured, green grass lawns.

Our connection to nature is being lost.

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# Sustainability Forum

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Marlin also showed slides of the sedimentation of the Illinois River. Except for the navigation channel, the River now averages only a two-foot depth. This filling of a once much deeper and more biologically productive waterway is the result of carelessness with the soil in our state. The effects on certain species that use/used the Illinois River has been devastating. Again, the connection is lost.

These connections must be restored to move towards sustainability. People have to understand what they are trying to sustain. It is not just wildlife, clean water, pretty flowers, and diverse food that we need to sustain — but we must do this to sustain ourselves and a good way of life.

The final speaker was Urbana Alderman Brandon Bowersox. Urbana has a long history of being green, and Bowersox described current and future efforts by the City to do even more.

The Kerr Avenue development is one example. Using "bioswales" instead of run-off detention ponds, connected geothermal systems, permeable pavers, and the optimal east - west alignment for passive solar gain are all elements that will make this affordable development a model green neighborhood.

Other strategies include growing the highly successful Market at the Square, transitioning traffic signals to LED, and conducting an energy audit. Another goal of increasing local recycling has been helped by the addition of a battery recycling program for City residents (see notice for drop-off locations) and the availability of mailers for recycling fluorescent bulbs to keep mercury out of our environment (see additional notice). All these efforts move the City towards its goal of decreasing its environmental footprint.

Prioritizing and implementing other elements in the Sustainable Urbana plan need the help and support of all of us. The Prairie Group is committed to working with the City on this effort.



## What do we do with our used CFL bulbs?

The City of Urbana now has the information! Recycling packs for Compact Florescent Lights (CFLs) or for the long tube type bulbs may be purchased at the **Urbana Public Works, 706 S. Glover, Urbana**. These complete kits include the box, liner bag, \*pre-paid\* shipping label, etc., and cost \$15 -- each kit can hold up to 12 small bulbs.

*What do I do about other mercury containing devices,  
like thermostats and medical thermometers?*

Easy – drop off your thermostats to **Urbana Public Works** and your thermometers at **Carle RX Express at 611 Park St., Urbana** — both places accept these items at no charge to you!

**Thanks for your help in keeping mercury out of our environment!**

## Household battery recycling

Also, the City of Urbana has instituted a household battery recycling program! Now you can drop off your single use *\*and\** rechargeable batteries (sorry, no auto batteries) at several locations around the City, including the **Anita Purves Nature Center**, the **Urbana City Building**, and the **Urbana Free Library**.

**We commend the City of Urbana for hosting this program, and urge our members to press other local governments to do the same for their residents!**

## Chair's Corner

# It's *Your* Sierra Club Group

by Dick Bishop, Chair of Prairie Group

Let me indulge in a brief introduction.

I have been a member of the Prairie Group Executive Committee since 2000. I am a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Illinois, retired since 1997, but still actively do mathematical research and regard that as my main job. Up to now my main activity for the Prairie Group has been as Political Chair, and I shall also continue that job.

The chair of the Prairie Group Executive Committee ("Excom" for short) does not have special powers and for me it will be more about bureaucracy than leadership. I am a great advocate of openness and it distresses me how the Excom runs the Prairie Group with so little input from the membership. With almost none of that member input we decide how often, where, and when there will be meetings, and what those meetings will be about. We man a table at the Farmers' Market in Urbana five or six months of the year. We decide what issues will be publicly addressed; we choose which local political races to make endorsements for, we interview the candidates, and decide whom to endorse. We send a delegate to the Chapter Excom meetings to represent the Prairie Group at the State level. We edit the Prairie Group pages of this newsletter and write most of the articles in those pages. We manage the Prairie Group web page and control who can write on the Alerts List. We read the mail sent to our post office box and answer the voicemails to our telephone number. Expenditures from the treasury are approved only by us. In recent years, there have been barely enough volunteers to serve on the Excom, so instead of a pointless election with no opposition, the Excom appoints its own members. These are just some of the activities of the Executive Committee does for the Prairie Group.

There are a few basic facts that many of you should (and do) know. The Sierra Club has three levels in its organization: the National Organization, headquartered in San Francisco; the chapters, which mostly consist of single states, as in Illinois; and the groups, of which there are 17 in Illinois. The Prairie Group consists of most of 12 counties in East Central Illinois: Champaign, Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar, Ford, Iroquois, Livingston, McLean, Piatt, Vermillion. About 600 of our roughly 1000 members are in Champaign County, the majority of the rest in McLean. Membership in the National Sierra Club automatically makes you a member of the chapter and group determined by your address. The Illinois Chapter and the Prairie Group have no dues. There are stipends from the national & state organizations and donations to fund local activities. The Prairie Group is fortunate to have a very active calendar sales program (run by Trent Shepard), supplemented by sales of a few things at the Farmers' Market, so our treasury is ample. The Illinois Chapter relies heavily on the March donation drive, which is always in danger of falling short.

The executive committee meetings have frequently been held at short notice. My hope is to formalize the Excom processes, so as to encourage more input and participation by members. Thus, I shall publish a written agenda on our website at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie> and send the information out on our ALERTS list (go to <http://lists.sierraclub.org/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?A0=IL-PRAIRIE-ALERTS> for more information about signing up or send an email to [pg-editor@illinois.sierraclub.org](mailto:pg-editor@illinois.sierraclub.org) ).

Of course, the public is free to attend these meetings; sometimes we have a meeting following the regular second-Tuesday of the month membership and informational meeting, and we hope some of you will stay on for the additional meeting. It would also be good to have more of you involved in the candidate-endorsement process; the interviews of the candidates can give a deeper insight into their thinking than from their standard speeches and literature. Feel free to e-mail any of us about your concerns, suggestions, and feedback.

Thank you.

## Upcoming Events **\*\*Note New Meeting Location!\*\***

**All General Meetings are at 7 PM on the 2nd Tuesday of the month.**

*Unless otherwise noted*, regular monthly meetings of the Prairie Group are held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of every month at 7 PM in the Bondurant Room (2nd floor), Illinois Disciples Foundation, 610 E Springfield, Champaign (NW corner Springfield & Wright).

**All are invited and welcome to participate.**

### April 8th

Former State Field Representative for the Illinois Sierra Club, Carolyn Raffensperger will explore the next generation of environmental ideas. Beginning with the precautionary principle and spiraling out to imaginative possibilities that give the Earth a sporting chance, Raffensperger will lay out a vision and strategic possibilities for environmental health and wholeness.

We've run some experiments over the past thirty years. What have we learned from those experiments? What lies ahead? Come join the conversation and plot the future.

### May 13th

Marie Streenz of Horizon Wind Energy will speak about the McLean County Twin Groves Wind Farm. This 396 megawatt clean electricity production facility will produce 1.3 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually with the 140 wind turbines in eastern McLean County. Come to the monthly meeting to hear about the future of clean power generation, what it means to the local economy, and our environment.

### June 10th

It's time for our annual member picnic. All are invited with good food, conversation, and entertainment. More information will be coming on the Prairie Group ALERTS List.

Sign up at

<http://lists.sierraclub.org/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?AO=IL-PRAIRIE-ALERTS>



## Are you Interested in a BOOK CLUB?

The Prairie Group is considering hosting "Book Club" with meetings a couple/few times per year. Classics, hot off the presses, or edgy would all be considered - what do you think? Would you participate?

If we were to suggest our first meeting be some time this fall, what book(s) might you suggest? The next issue of the Prairie Flyer will have the details based on feedback from you.

**We want to hear from you to make our Book Club work!**

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**Open Positions**  
Outings Chair, Fundraising

**Letters to the Editor**—We appreciate comments, questions, or story ideas for the *Prairie Flyer*. Contact us by email at [pg-editor@illinois.sierraclub.org](mailto:pg-editor@illinois.sierraclub.org) or at the mailing address or phone number listed to the right. Please include your full name and contact information. The Prairie Group wants to hear from you.

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