
PRAIRIE FLYER

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

Urbana: Getting Cooler all the Time

By Kirstin Repogle

Huey Lewis and the News had a hit song in the 1980s called “Hip to be Square” that celebrated being, well, square, or at least “normal.” Today, being green seems to be the new cool thing. Some might argue that people shouldn’t adopt green practices in order to be hip, while others maintain that anything that gets people to behave in a more environmentally-sane manner is just plain groovy (count us in the latter category.)

Here in Urbana, we are fortunate that our City government views reducing its environmental impact as being more than a fad, as exciting recent developments have shown.

First, Urbana Mayor Laurel Lunt Prussing signed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement on May 23, 2007. This puts Urbana on the path of becoming a Cool City, by committing to reducing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to 7% below 1990 levels by the year 2012. Mayor Prussing has our congratulations for taking this important step, and we look forward to assisting the City as it pursues this goal.

Second, on August 9th of this year, the City released “Sustainable Urbana: A Place to Work, Live, and Grow.” This draft, which covers topics from energy efficiency to community outreach to waste and recycling, lists many of the steps the City has already taken in these areas, opportunities for future improvements, and the challenges each topic presents. Early communications with City officials indicate a strong desire for community feedback on how to move forward with these ambitious goals. The report is available online at: http://www.charliesmyth.org/docs/Sustainable_Urbana_Report.pdf.

This report accomplishes several early steps in a Cool Cities campaign by identifying actions the city has taken that already reduce GHGs (such as the purchase of hybrid vehicles and the installation of solar-powered flashing lights at the intersection of Windsor and Vine) and also identifying “low hanging fruit” that will quickly save the City money while further reducing GHGs.

The timing of this report was serendipitous, as it coincided with a training event hosted by the Sierra Club’s Cool Cities staff discussing the process for creating a GHG inventory. Taking an inventory of GHG emissions is the next step -- after those already take in the Sustainable Urbana report -- towards developing a Climate Action Plan. The Clean Air and Climate Protection Software was developed by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), and allows municipalities to input data for past years’ emissions and the determined necessary cutbacks, and then model the costs and benefits of various scenarios before implementation so that the most effective and appropriate plans are put in place.

This is a complicated process. It involves the calculation of direct emissions (such as those from fuel consumption by the municipal fleet) and indirect emissions (such as those from a power plant that serves a region much larger than one city). A great deal of data will need to be collected in order to calculate baseline emissions – this would be a great way for volunteers to help out the city.

One important feature of the software is that it provides for separate calculations for community emissions (the whole pie) and government emissions (a slice of the pie). It is

estimated that municipal governments generate only 3-5% of a community’s total emissions. So even significant reductions in the government sector will produce only limited reductions overall, yet the opportunity for the city to show bold leadership is enormous.

In addition to the GHG inventory, this program allows cities to track air pollutants that are co-produced with GHGs (such as mercury from coal-fired power plants) and the resulting cuts in these levels along with the reduced GHGs. Cities can then better protect public health while at the same time working to solve the climate crisis.

This software is available at no charge to municipalities that are members of ICLEI, and membership is a relatively nominal fee. In addition to the software, membership in ICLEI provides cities with technical support and a host of other resources to support these efforts. (For anyone interested in learning more about ICLEI, visit their website at <http://www.iclei.org>)

The typical timeframe for developing a Climate Action Plan using the ICLEI software is approximately one year. This fits in well with Urbana’s draft report, which is looking 5 and even 10 years down the road.

Sustainable Urbana is a solid step towards being “cool,” but it needs your support and input. Please check it out at the address listed in this article, and give your feedback to the City or to the Prairie Group and we will carry your message forward. And if you’d like to get your city to be as cool as Urbana, contact Kirstin Repogle, kirstinrep@mac.com, to get started.

Building Healthy Communities: Land Use, Transportation, and their Environmental Impact

By Cynthia Hoyle

The environmental impact of the American land use-transportation system is huge. This may seem like stating the obvious, but this fact is often overlooked in discussions on how to best reduce our detrimental impact on the environment. Environmental impact reduction often focuses on sexier ideas such as alternative fuels, electric cars, solar and wind power, etc. All of these technologies are important to addressing global warming and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels, but a technological fix will not solve our ever-expanding conversion of land from rural/wild to urban/suburban.

It may be a familiar story, but it bears repeating. How did the United States arrive at its current system of sprawling cities and almost total auto dependence? Prior to WWII the U.S. had a viable national rail system, compact cities, and most urban areas had trolleys or subways. All of this changed rapidly after the end of WWII. President Eisenhower initiated the national interstate highway system to provide for quick movement of both military and civilian populations in the event of attack. Congress passed a program to insure home loans, particularly for returning veterans, and federal loans came with requirements for how new housing developments would be planned and constructed. For example, a minimum street width was established for any homes to be sold using federally-guaranteed loans. The minimum street width was based on the perceived need to be able to get heavy equipment into neighborhoods to remove debris in the event of a nuclear attack.

The new federal policies, along with the desire to own a new home, combined to create a post-war boom of housing construction that resulted in the massive suburbanization that we see today. Most new subdivisions built in our country do not provide residents with choices in mobility. They are usually too far from shopping, schools, work, or recreation to walk, bike or have access to viable transit. Most families with two working adults have at least two cars and often three or more as children reach the age of driving and parents can be relieved of the duty of chauffeuring.

The long-term consequences of a built environment that requires driving to fulfill everyday needs has had unforeseen consequences. Some of those consequences are:

The conversion of our most valuable farmland into subdivisions, which in turn requires food to be transported longer distances and consumes additional fuel and contributes further to the emission of airborne toxins and global warming.

The fragmentation of our wild lands. As wild lands are designated for protection the private land surrounding our national parks, wilderness areas, etc. are subdivided and developed based on the amenity of adjoining a wild area.

The Center for Disease Control has concluded that obesity is an epidemic and expressed alarm at rising rates of childhood obesity. The CDC is now predicting that if current rates of obesity continue to increase unchecked this generation of Americans could be the first in the history of our country to have a shorter lifespan than their parents. The CDC has begun to scientifically establish the health impacts of our built environment and has become a big player in advocating for communities to change how we are designing new development.

The media has begun to pay attention to these trends and their impacts. You probably are aware of many of the issues described above. How do we change our land use and transportation system? It will not happen overnight, but we have to begin. If it were possible to reduce the number of trips made by single-occupancy vehicles by half, this would have a dramatic impact on the environment and our health.

The Sierra Club's Building Healthy Communities Campaign lists a number of resources on the national Sierra Club website. The website attempts to provide activists with not only facts and resources, but also tools to help envision how we can make changes to reduce our environmental impact. One of these tools is the Healthy Growth Calculator.

(See: www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/density/summary)

You can enter data on housing density, transportation options, etc. and compare the impact on resource consumption, pollution, land use, etc. to the average sprawling suburban development. For example, if you were to increase the number of households per residential acre from 3 to 8, you would see the following improvements:

Land used: from 333 acres in a sprawling development to 125 acres in a development with 8 houses per acre.

Roads and sidewalks: from 233,333 sq.yards/1000 households to 87,500 sq. yards.

Water use: 1,032 gallons per household to 487 gallons/household

Auto costs: \$3,439 (cost of fuel alone per year) to \$2,615/year

Pollution: from 62 pounds of organic compounds per household per year to 47 pounds/year from 274 pounds of particulates to 202 pounds/year from 16.5 tons of greenhouse gases per household each year to 12.5 tons/year.

Transit service: from 0 buses per hour to 13/hour.

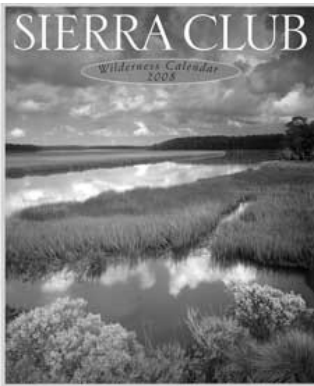
Miles driven per household per year – from 23,552 to 17,907

Gallons of gasoline used per household per year from 1,178 to 895.

(Continued next page)

It's That Time of the Year Again

The ever popular Sierra Club calendars are ready for 2008!



The popular Sierra Club calendars come in two varieties

The Wilderness Wall Calendar with 12 large spectacular photos that will awe you every day of the month, every month of the year

and

The Engagement Calendar with a new photo every week, 57 perfect-color photos in all.

The Sierra Club calendars are the most popular item sold by the Sierra Club with over 7 million sold.


This has been a Sierra Club tradition for over 30 years.

Make sure you get your favorite calendar—

Wilderness Wall Calendar or Engagement Calendar—before they run out.



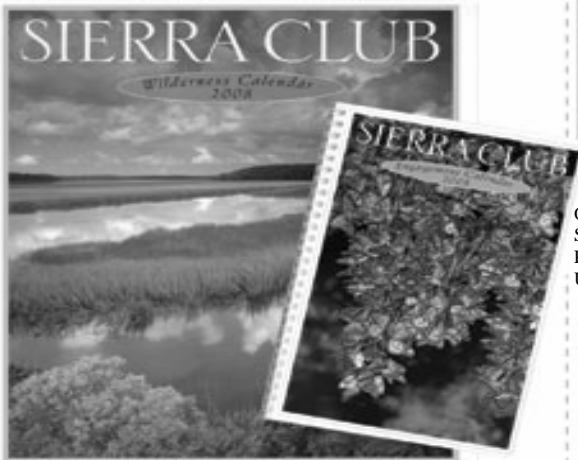
Use this order form:



SIERRA CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

Sierra Club 2008 Calendars



Order Form

Item	Cost	Quantity	Total
Engagement Calendar	<input type="checkbox"/> \$13.95	_____	_____
Wilderness Calendar	<input type="checkbox"/> \$12.95	_____	_____
Subtotal			_____
Shipping (\$3 per calendar)			_____
Grand Total			_____

Order from your local group or send check or money order to with this form to:
Sierra Club Prairie Group
P.O. Box 131
Urbana, IL 61803

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone (____) _____
Email _____

Building Healthy Communities (Continued from previous page)

The results of this analysis are moderate compared to an increase from the typical 3 houses per acre in most new subdivisions to a higher density/mixed-use development. When you have higher densities, you can often walk and bike to run errands or go to school or work, you can sustain better transit, build and maintain fewer roads, etc.

In Champaign-Urbana, members of the cycling and environmental communities made the effort to participate in recent community visioning and planning processes and the results have been striking. The community passed a new transportation plan that calls for less sprawl and more infill and mixed-use development. It also called for a multi-modal transportation system that gives the residents a choice as to whether to travel by bus, car, bike, or on foot. In less than 2 years, the community went from no bike lanes to new bike lanes being installed and more on the way, as well as bike plans being developed for the City of Urbana, the City of Champaign, and another in the planning stages for the University of Illinois.

The experience in Urbana-Champaign points to the impact that a small but dedicated group of activists can have in raising issues in a community. The City of Urbana is working on a sustainability plan. Recent surveys have found that 54% of the households in the community have a household member who has used the transit system in the last year. In Urbana, 35% of the trips to work are by walking, biking, bus, or other means such as car pooling. More infill and mixed-use projects have been proposed and are being built every day.

For more ideas about how you can begin to make your community more sustainable, go to the Building Healthy Communities Campaign website at: www.sierraclub.org/sprawl.

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

All General Meetings are at 7 PM on the 2nd Tuesday of the month. For the meetings from September to December 2007— Unless otherwise noted, regular monthly meetings of the Prairie Group are held on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 7 PM in the Bondurant Room (2nd floor), Illinois Disciples Foundation, 610 E Springfield, Champaign (NW corner Springfield & Wright).

October 9th

Join us for a discussion of Cool Cities and the Sustainable Urbana report (*see related article this issue*). The City of Urbana is making a serious effort towards sustainability and reducing greenhouse gases - but they need our support and input. We are inviting elected officials and city staff for a roundtable discussion on priorities and implementation of some terrific ideas. To download the report, please go to http://www.charliesmyth.org/docs/Sustainable_Urbana_Report.pdf

We look forward to hearing from you!

November 13th

We hope to have a representative from the Prairie Rivers Network talk to us about river restoration on the Upper Mississippi River. Biology curricula in our schools teach more about the Amazon than our own Mississippi River, so many people are unaware of the issues faced by this important river. Should this presentation be unavailable, please look for a postcard mailing for further information.

December 11th

Join us for our annual "Vacation Slide Show" evening! We will have a slide projector and computer equipment (for both PC and Apple computers) available. In order to accommodate everyone, please limit your presentation to 10 minutes or less. Please feel free to bring a holiday treat to share!



Happy 100th Birthday Urbana Park District!

Saturday & Sunday, October 13 & 14 at Crystal Lake Park

The Prairie Group is pleased to help the Urbana Park District celebrate its 100th birthday during its Centennial Chautauqua at Crystal Lake Park! The site of the original Chautauquas, Crystal Lake Park will revive the old time event with a 21st century twist. With six days of music, story-telling, and speeches, there is something for everyone. In particular, we are excited about the appearances of "John Muir" and "Rachel Carson" on Saturday the 13th, and a speech by none other than Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. on Sunday the 14th!

For a complete schedule of the event, please go to www.urbanaparks.org/special/Chautauqua.html

Please come out and make this event a huge success!

Executive Committee Members of the Prairie Group

Kirstin Repogle**

Chair

217-344-3809, kirstinrep@mac.com

Dick Bishop*

Vice Chair, Alternate Chapter Delegate

217-328-6379, bishop@math.uiuc.edu

Jim Beauchamp**

Membership Chair

217-344-3307, jwbeauch@uiuc.edu

Peg Flynn*

Secretary, Newsletter Editor, Membership Co-Chair

217-352-4114, mjflynn121@yahoo.com

Alice Englebretsen*

Chapter Delegate, Treasurer

217-367-7344, a.engebretsen@insightbb.com

Don Davis**

Environmental Education Chair, Conservation Chair, Outings Chair

217-903-5678, donaldavis@aol.com

Stuart Levy**

Webmaster

slevy@ncsa.uiuc.edu

Trent Shepard

Publications Representative

217-344-2822, tshepard@prairienet.org

Cynthia Hoyle*

choyle@cumtd.com

* elected or appointed to ExCom for 2006-2007

** elected or appointed to ExCom for 2007-2008

Open Positions

Program Chair, Publicity Chair, Fundraising

Website: <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie>

Mailing address:

Sierra Club Prairie Group

P.O. Box 131

Urbana, IL 61803