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DVRPC Sustainability Survey: Summary of Results

In early 2009, DVRPC conducted a survey to identify local sustainability planning efforts underway among municipalities in the Delaware Valley region. The survey was completed by 82 individuals representing 70 municipalities (about 20% of all municipalities in the nine-county Delaware Valley region). This document summarizes the results of the survey. For more information, please contact Evangeline Linkous, Planning Analyst, DVRPC, at elinkous@dvrpc.org or (215) 622-6055.

The Sustainability Survey was divided into two sections. In the first part, respondents were asked to identify natural resource protection tools in place in their community. In the second part, respondents were asked to identify the status of local sustainability-related planning and programs.

Responses to the first section indicate that most responding municipalities have natural resource protection tools in place:

- The most frequently-adopted natural resource protection ordinances are Open Space Plans (76%) and Steep Slope Ordinances (71%); the least frequently-adopted natural resource protection ordinances are Wetlands Ordinances/Mapping and TDR Ordinances.
- 60% of responding municipalities do not have an Environmental Resources Inventory, which is critical for identifying unique, natural resources and local environmental concerns.
- Most responding municipalities also have one or more citizens' commissions related to the maintenance of natural resources. A majority (64%) of reporting municipalities have Environmental Commissions. However, only 11% of responding municipalities have a Sustainability Committee.

In general, most municipalities have some natural resources tools already in place, laying the groundwork for an increased focus on issues of sustainability. Survey responses to the first section will be posted to the DVRPC website in 2009.

In the second section, respondents identified measures their community has taken in various sustainability-related categories: energy, climate change, green buildings, etc. Responses to the second section are highlighted on the following page. In the coming months, DVRPC will develop and post an online Municipal Sustainability Planning Inventory to the DVRPC website that will list local sustainability planning efforts underway throughout the region. Some findings are:

- While very few municipalities reported completing or commencing a sustainability-related resolution, ordinance, plan, or plan element, a significant minority—25 to 32%—reported considering these initiatives. However, larger percentages—38 to 60%—noted that their municipality is not considering such efforts.
- Many municipalities (40 to 50%) reported participation in sustainability-related outreach or partnership efforts; the most common was creating a sustainability task force.
- The most widely-adopted sustainability initiatives relate to urban forestry: 59% of municipalities have adopted tree protection ordinances and 40% have instituted tree planting programs. Recycling initiatives are also prevalent, with over half of local governments having completed or commenced development of their recycling program.
- Energy programs are receiving less municipal attention. Responding municipalities do report considering and carrying out smaller-scale programs, such as doing energy audits of and retrofitting municipal buildings, but initiatives on a community-wide scale are less frequently considered.
- To further local sustainability planning initiatives, respondents indicated that municipalities need staff training and technical assistance in developing sustainability elements (both reported by 35% of respondents).

DVRPC Sustainability Survey Results: Status of Local Sustainability Initiatives

	Completed	In Progress	Will Start Within Year	Under Consideration	Not Being Considered
Sustainability Planning					
Municipal operations and/or facilities sustainability policies	15%	12%	4%	32%	38%
Community-wide sustainability policies	8%	10%	3%	32%	48%
Sustainability policies (general)	7%	10%	6%	25%	54%
Sustainability element in comprehensive plan	10%	14%	7%	25%	47%
Sustainability plan (separate from comprehensive plan)	0%	8%	4%	28%	60%
Outreach/Partnership					
Green, climate change, or sustainability task force/advisory group	15%	10%	6%	21%	49%
Educational forums related to local sustainability initiatives	15%	8%	4%	21%	51%
Signing of green, climate change, or sustainability agreement	18%	5%	0%	18%	60%
Energy-related Initiatives					
Energy audit of municipal facilities	20%	13%	7%	40%	20%
Energy efficiency upgrades in municipal facilities	10%	32%	10%	38%	14%
Initiatives to foster private sector energy efficiency efforts	3%	21%	3%	39%	35%
Municipal operations carbon footprint/greenhouse gas inventory	4%	11%	3%	24%	59%
Community-wide carbon footprint or greenhouse gas inventory	4%	9%	3%	22%	62%
Greenhouse gas reduction targets	4%	7%	4%	20%	65%
Purchase of renewable energy certificates/credits (RECs)	4%	1%	0%	23%	71%
Renewable energy portfolio standards	8%	4%	3%	18%	67%
Municipal Operations and Maintenance					
Use of green fleets	4%	16%	0%	32%	48%
Municipal green purchasing program	4%	14%	1%	32%	49%
Recycling					
Expansion or improvements to municipal recycling program	25%	32%	5%	23%	15%
Program to foster expanded recycling of construction materials	9%	9%	4%	24%	53%
Urban forestry					
Tree protection ordinance	59%	9%	1%	12%	21%
Tree planting program	40%	17%	0%	18%	26%