



## Grand Island: Collaboration, cooperation keys to success

Collaboration and cooperation are becoming increasingly important among rural communities and counties in Nebraska, both large and small, according to Sheryl Hiatt, Economic Development Manager in the Business Development Division, Nebraska Department of Economic Development. Hiatt and Mark Gustafson, Coordinator of Rural Economic and Business Development at the UNL Rural Initiative, said that Nebraska communities are finding it imperative to work more closely together in the face of limited resources and limited leadership resources.

Speaking at the Nebraska Sustainability Leadership Workshop in Grand Island in January, Hiatt and Gustafson told participants that communities that are accustomed to competing are finding it not only necessary but advantageous to cooperate with one another, a sustainable solution. One example, said Hiatt, is recent collaboration



Grand Island participants agreed that collaboration is increasingly important

among potential wind energy land-owners to form cooperatives. "This gives them greater leverage when dealing with some of the large energy firms that are now approaching them," she said. "Because they formed their cooperative before they were approached, they are able to present themselves as a much stronger entity in negotiations."

The need for collaboration and cooperation was echoed by partici-

pants as they discussed issues like water contamination, the move of the Nebraska State Fair to Grand Island, the need for civic and county leaders with a high degree of expertise in various areas, public health initiatives, flooding, growing and retaining a young and talented workforce, and economics. That collaboration can be rural to urban, county to county, and city to city. Read more on the website:

[www.nslw.org/grandisland.html](http://www.nslw.org/grandisland.html)



## Water Policy Conference set for April 29, 30

*Blue Gold: When Water Meets Money* is the title of the sixth annual Water Law, Policy, and Science Conference. The conference will be held April 29 and 30 at the Embassy Suites in Lincoln. Water quality, quantity, economics, water transfers and banking, irrigation, climate change, and water law will be among the many topics addressed.

The conference is sponsored by the University of Nebraska's Water Center in the School of Natural Resources. For more information, visit the website:

<http://watercenter.unl.edu>



## LEED-EB Operations & Maintenance Workshop

Want to learn how to implement sustainable strategies in your facility? The U.S. Green Building Council will be conducting a workshop for building owners, operators and maintenance professionals involved in implementing LEED for Existing Buildings: Operation and Maintenance. It will walk attendees through the phases of a typical project, using case examples and implementation strategies throughout to reinforce learning and encourage participants to apply knowledge to real-life situations. Continuing education credits are available. The workshop will be held 8:30 am to 5 pm April 24 in Building 7, Room 107 of the Ft. Omaha Campus of Metropolitan Community College in Omaha. Call 800-795-1747 for more information, visit the website, [workshop@usgbc.org](mailto:workshop@usgbc.org), or email Barbara Luna at [bluna@fbgservices.com](mailto:bluna@fbgservices.com).

## NSLW consultants are available for your group

The experts and facilitators of the NSLW are available for custom-designed half-day or full-day programs. Whether you're interested in learning more about LEED certification, energy efficiency, community food systems, wastewater engineering, or water quality, we can help. If you are interested in setting up a custom program, please call Katie Torpy at 402-933-0080, or W. Cecil Steward at 402.472.0087 to set up a custom program.

## NSLW Network is growing

The establishment of a network of civic, county, and sustainability leaders is one of the major aims of the NSLW. Name by name and workshop by workshop, our network is growing. The idea is to give you access to people across the state who can share ideas and information with you, exchange ideas about challenges and solutions, and more. Visit our website to learn more: [www.nslw.org/network.html](http://www.nslw.org/network.html).

## Columbus workshop addresses empty buildings, water

Aging and empty downtown buildings in some of Central Nebraska's cities and towns present both big challenges and important opportunities, participants in the sixth Nebraska Sustainability Leadership Workshop agreed. Central to the issue is whether to deconstruct, rehab and renovate, or rebuild.

John F. Lohr, City Councilman from Columbus, said, "We in Columbus have looked towards Hastings as a model. Hastings has housing in the downtown area and has done an excellent job with both affordable and higher-end housing in the second floors of the downtown area. Sustainability is about financing these opportunities."

Such re-purposing of business districts' upper stories and empty buildings provides an immediate customer base as well as rental or sales income for the businesses, provides aesthetically appealing "urban" living spaces for young professionals as well as convenient housing for older residents. It can also help people save on gasoline and thereby help air quality, and, in general, help to revitalize a downtown area. In addition, some towns have a seriously depleted housing stock, and rehabilitating buildings downtown can add fresh housing at reduced cost.



Empty buildings provide challenges and opportunities

"Getting residents into the second floors of businesses downtown can create a second and third income stream for the businesses in the area," Lohr said.

Among the challenges towns face are a surfeit of building and construction materials filling local landfills, local zoning regulations and fire and building codes, and, in some instances, lack of elevators. In addition, providing new communications technologies - like WiFi and broadband access - in these structures that will attract and retain a younger workforce can be a challenge.

Read more: [www.nslw.org/columbus.html](http://www.nslw.org/columbus.html)

## Building a young, vital workforce topic in Beatrice workshop

Enterprising ideas to attract and retain a young workforce can provide a catalyst for finding solutions to other issues cities and towns in Nebraska face. A wealth of ideas and resolutions were discussed at the seventh NSLW Workshop in Beatrice on March 12 and 13.

Dale Crawford, Mayor of Wymore, echoed the concerns of some participants: "We are having to spend \$4 million on wastewater issues in Wymore. Yet we have empty storefronts. We have only four or five people in leadership positions, doing everything."

Creating a milieu in which younger, more effective leadership is encouraged and grows out of a more vibrant business community seems to be critical key. Crawford said,

"We seem to be missing opportunities in our communities, often because change is scary to most people."

Joe Carbonneau, Mayor of Chester, a village of 294 in Thayer County, painted a stark picture of his town: "Declining population is a main issue for Chester. Our future is bleak. Kids are leaving, and 10 to 15 years down the road, we might not be there."

Milan Wall, co-founder of the Heartland Center, identified four critical issues facing smaller communities in Nebraska: an out-migration of young people, declining businesses, declining number of dollars that are provided to smaller communities, and a waning pool of community leaders.

But Nebraska's rural cities, towns, and villages are places of

great opportunity, if viewed through the prism of sustainability, Wall pointed out.

"Half of the towns in Nebraska have 400 people or less," Wall said. "There is a national study that says any county with less than 50,000 people and any community outside of a fifty-mile stretch is doomed. Well, we have a number of communities that are defying this pronouncement. And Nebraska has many exceptions."

"It is what leaders say and do that makes a difference," Wall advised. "Sustainability leaders promote asset-based community development."

Read more on the website: [www.nslw.org/beatrice.html](http://www.nslw.org/beatrice.html)

**Upcoming Workshops: March 26-27 in Blair, April 16-17 in Nebraska City, April 30-May 1 in Norfolk, May 14-15 in O'Neill. Call Katie Torpy at 402-933-0080 to sign up.**