

Greener Living: A weekly guide to sustainability
"Our Sustainable Community: The Calling of our Time"

As you may have heard in the news this week, the Green Cities™ Huntsville Summit was held Monday, May 11 at the Space and Rocket Center. What a fitting location for the launching of a new era in our history of the Huntsville/Madison County metropolitan area. The Huntsville Summit was a visioning planning exercise by leaders in the government, business, community, and education sectors to lay out the specific needs facing our metropolitan area in the near term with a focus on future sustainability. It further targeted the opportunities we have before us as well as the many difficulties. Certainly, it was a lesson in understanding the many challenges we will face as we drive toward sustainability but also further solidified the great opportunities we have in front of us in Huntsville/Madison County.

Make no mistake, the drive to a sustainable community is going to be an expansive effort and a major undertaking that must involve our entire metropolitan area. As we were challenged during the space race in the 1960's, so must our efforts match those of the leaders of that era. We must not shrink from this challenge, but engage it with a definitive and actionable plan to move our community into the forefront of sustainability in the nation. The obvious question is why now? The reason is simple. A sustainable community is simply the calling of our time. Just as the Saturn V rocket was developed as the solution to the challenge of getting to the moon, so our community has been challenged to develop a solution to the vision of a sustainable community. This solution must be practical and equitable for all.

The practical application of sustainability practices and principles starts with a simple change in perspective from a more singular approach to a more global perspective. This shift in perspective can be applied in business, education, government, or in your own personal life. Let's look at an example of sustainability in a residential structure, specifically water efficiency. Thinking on a global scale, if we are able to build a house that needs 80% less water than a standard house, the water utility could downsize the distribution lines, thus saving money and resources to all users, and would not have to use as much power pumping and cleaning water to deliver to the house, again, saving energy and reducing resource consumption. How about electrical service? If we are able to build a house that required no electrical energy from the grid, then the local utility would not need to provide service to the house, then the electric utility would not need to size the transmission lines as large to that development, and therefore the generating plant would not consume as much fuel to create that electricity for that house. Sustainability makes sense, is practical, and focuses on the global perspective to target and approach the future needs of our community.

The challenges we face as a region in the near term and foreseeable future can be met head on with the proper development and implementation of a practical sustainability plan. This will lead to increased economic activity, sustainable job creation, practical and effective resource management and environmental policies that will benefit the entire community as a whole. It will propel our region into continued prosperity now and in the future. As we work together, we will certainly agree on some avenues of approaching sustainability, and we will most certainly disagree on other approaches. But, as we work together toward a common vision and goal, we will all learn along the way, and at the end of the day, we will be delivering a sustainable future for our community. What will this sustainable future look like? What will it encompass? Who at this point is to say. It is a future that will hold great promise for future generations if we are bold enough as a community to take hold of these concepts, and stand up and answer this calling of our time.

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