What is Sustainability?

There are many definitions and there are many different ways for communities to attain a more sustainable future, but sustainability may be best defined as: *A community's ongoing capacity and resolve to work together to establish, advance, and maintain effective strategies in a process of continuous improvement so communities constantly evolve and make changes to accomplish their goals and improve health and quality of life for all*.

The sustainability of a community depends on creating and maintaining its economic and environmental health, promoting social equity, and fostering broad-based citizen participation in planning and implementation. Communities that engage citizens and institutions in collaboration to develop sustainability principles and a collective vision for the future and that apply an integrative approach to environmental, economic, and social goals are generally likely to be more successful. Job creation, energy use, housing, transportation, education and health are considered complementary parts of the whole.

Sustainable communities are communities planned, built, or modified to promote sustainable living. Coalitions, organizations, and communities are encouraged to focus their issues, strategies, goals, and resources on policies that aim to improve the health and well-being of its residents.

How to Create Sustainability 101

1. <u>Eliminate (or at least decrease) financial dependency.</u> Stable resources are essential for anything enduring. Consider creating an endowment fund, support volunteer efforts, and keep good, clear, financial records.
2. <u>Commitment to the project, coalition, or community</u>. Encourage and maintain the involvement and commitment of community members.
3. <u>Develop a clear purpose and vision</u>. This will help provide the coalition, partners, and community an understanding of what the project is about and what would be the final product or outcome.
4. <u>Empowerment</u>. There must be a willingness to allow the community to become directly involved in the decision making process. The process must include components where the community is allowed to take direct responsibility for initiating and implementing projects.
5. <u>Patience and Flexibility.</u> Within a community, there is a wide range of abilities and knowledge. Time is required to bring everyone's understanding to a common level. If community responsibility and ownership is to be developed, it is imperative that the members of the community investigate and develop their own solutions. The coalition, partners, community and project itself must be able to accommodate changes-planned or unexpected.
6. <u>Consensus</u>. The coalition and partners generally consist of representatives from a variety of sectors in the community: environmental groups, business and industry,

schools, neighborhood associations, healthcare and social service providers, and agriculture.

7. <u>Monitoring and Reporting</u>. In order to maintain community support, there must be some mechanism available to the community to both report on its own efforts and learn about the efforts of others. The community must be involved in an annual review of the vision statement and any decision making process where priorities are set for implementing the vision statement.