



1/22/2010 **CENTERING ON...**

Beyond Copenhagen /

How Local Governments are Taking the Lead on Climate Change

By Anna Clark

While global heads of state are continuing their conversations about how to respond to climate change, Michigan communities are committing to concrete action. Through partnerships and collaborations, change is happening – yet again – from the ground up.

It wasn't just international leaders who flooded the city of Copenhagen last month for the United Nations Climate Change Conference; nonprofit and local leaders also made their way to Denmark's capital. Brian Beauchamp of the Michigan Land Use Institute was one of them.

While Beauchamp said that he was among the many people who had hoped the Copenhagen summit would result in "an ambitious, bold, and binding agreement" among nations to limit carbon emissions, that didn't quite happen. The 192 participating nations formally "recognized" the need to keep collective temperatures below two degrees Celsius, but they made no formal commitments to do so. Nations are slated to reconvene in Mexico City in November 2010 to take the conversation—and the action steps--further (though many are advocating to push the meeting up).

As a result of the slow pace of the world's nations to actively respond to climate change, Brian Beauchamp is thinking more about the role of smaller governments and citizens.

"Much of the responsibility is going back to individual countries and states," Beauchamp said. "We'll be relying on regions and cities to drive the economic growth and sustainability."

Dr. Henry Pollack is a climate scientist and University of Michigan professor who also made his way to Copenhagen. After seeing how world leaders are committing to “baby steps” even as climate change happens rapidly, the author of [A World Without Ice](#) came away with a renewed awareness of local action.

“Mayors can implement things the state can’t, and states can implement things that federal governments can’t,” Pollack said. “The further down the tree, the faster and bolder the action.

“If bolder steps are taken at lower levels,” Pollack added, “Congress will hear from its constituents and cities. I like the idea of (cities) moving forward independently.”

Indeed, smaller municipalities are stepping up to what Beauchamp calls “maybe the first global issue ever.”

Delegates from twenty-two southeast Michigan cities have agreed to propel each of their local governments to reduce energy consumption from non-renewable sources by 25 percent by 2015 (compared to 2005 levels). These cities have also pledged to cut energy consumption from all other sources—such as residents, business, and school districts—by 5.14%

Accomplishing what world leaders have not yet done, established and emerging leaders in the [Millennial Mayors Congress](#) came to a consensus agreement to take collective action by implementing concrete local changes.

A [recent article](#) in *Crain’s Detroit Business* put the collaborative project in context:

One of the biggest costs to municipalities is the heating and cooling buildings, said Eastpointe Mayor Suzanne Pixley, congress chairwoman.

“Anything you can do to reduce a major expense for a city is going to help,” she said.

The goal “could not only help communities cut their costs but help attract new alternative-energy businesses,” Pixley said.

The two-pronged goal marks the Millennial Mayor Congress’ first official target and is modeled after the state goal ... to cut the Michigan’s energy consumption by 25 percent by 2015.

The congress is using 2005 as a base year “to be sure that recent local government efforts to cut energy use can be included,” said Sharon Carney, special project director for the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, overseeing the congress.

Brendan Frey is a 29-year-old attorney with Mantese Honigman Rossman and Williamson P.C. He's also the city of Ferndale's representative in the Millennial Mayors Congress, working with Mayor Craig Covey. Frey is clear about the purpose of working with leaders of other cities to effect change both locally and regionally.

"The MMC made a consensus decision to set a serious goal of reducing energy purchases from nonrenewable sources," he said. "Pursuing, and eventually achieving this goal should improve the physical environment and the fiscal bottom line for member communities."

In particular, Frey said, the initial focus of cities will be to update and retrofit municipal buildings, while ensuring that any new constructions is built to high standards. Cities will also pursue opportunities to purchase energy from renewable sources—eschewing the coal-generated electricity of the past.

And about the notion that energy efficient transformation simply has too much up-front expense? "The economic benefits far outweigh the cost put into it," Brian Beauchamp said.

So how did it happen? How did the MMC consortium of cities move through a discussion that inevitably provokes varied interests to ultimately come to a consensus commitment to take measurable action?

Frey said that the process unfolded in discrete steps over the course of six months of meetings and email exchanges.

"First, the MMC as a whole identified fiscal and environmental sustainability as the issue for this year," Frey said. "Second, the executive committee, with assistance from the (Michigan) Suburbs Alliance, investigated various options and came up with a protocol recommendation for the MMC as a whole. The protocol was discussed, changes were made, and eventually the MMC came up with a protocol that everyone could accept."

Perhaps what propelled the MMC's process was the fact that participating city leaders and representatives agreed on a common vision for the region's direction – one that is regional, sustainable, collaborative and engaged with different voices. It is the hammering out of details where the conversation can get complicated.

It is a fact that Brian Beauchamp acknowledges as well – whether the process involves a collection of cities or of nations.

"It's messy, sticky, challenging – but if you do it right and invest in preparation then you don't have to convince people afterwards (that a strategy is the best one)," Beauchamp said. "So much more of this (the climate summits) is about process than the final product. The worst thing you can do is to get stuck defending a good idea."

Frey, who followed the Copenhagen summit from his home in Ferndale, said that he can see how the issue becomes increasingly complex on the international stage.

"Globally, the issue is more complicated and the world leaders have many more conflicts and agendas to work through," Frey said. "The (MMC) process is similar in that each requires generally-sovereign bodies to work independently to achieve a shared goal. The process is necessary to overcome serious challenges that cannot be solved by any one member of the community acting on its own."

It is perhaps inevitable that an issue like climate change, which leaves no one unaffected, catalyzes a response from people at all different vantages. Beauchamp, who believes the ground-up action will push the Mexico City summit to happen sooner rather than later, sees how communities and regions around the world that are most effective are the ones that thrive on "public input processes."

"What never works is to have a small group of leaders get in a room, come up with an idea, and try to sell it," Beauchamp said.

Beauchamp noted that whatever the world leaders at the summit do or don't commit to, the summit is activating citizens to collaborate and make change on local levels. And Michigan, he said, has such an opportunity play a role in it.

"Change is working its way through the system right now," he added. "Organizations like the Michigan Suburbs Alliance and the Michigan Land Use Institute are seizing the day."

Dr. Pollack is hopeful that the passage of a U.S. climate bill will strengthen President Obama's hand at the next summit. Like Beauchamp, though, he's aware that positive action depends upon the contribution of many voices.

"If you want government to do something, you have to hear from the people," he said.

Frey is already doing his part through his action on the MMC ... and he's looking for other leaders to step up.

"Copenhagen did not specifically activate the local action of the MMC, but the fact that the efforts are complimentary is a good thing

"We should all be doing what we can as individuals," Frey said. "Civic officials have control over more areas, and therefore more responsibility. Moving the region and state forward is going to require a combined effort."

Dr. Henry Pollack is speaking about his new book, A World Without Ice, at two upcoming events that are open to the public: February 12 at the Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills; and March 17 at the Brighton Public Library in Brighton (hosted by the Sierra Club). Both events are at 7:00 pm.

From:

http://www.michigansuburbsalliance.org/news_events/center_ring_features/center_ring_jan101?utm_source=CenterRing%3A+FULL+EMAIL+LIST&utm_campaign=7d01ccf72d-CenterRing_eNews_1_11_200911_10_2009&utm_medium=email