

The Benefits of Sustainability (551 words)

The word “sustainable” means different things to different people. To some, it might describe a process that can be maintained indefinitely—like the Energizer Bunny, it “keeps going and going.” To others, it might describe a resource (such as sunlight) that can be used with little or no impact on the environment. Combining these and other perspectives, sustainability is essentially a way of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Planning for the Future

This concept of protecting and preserving not only our own health, environment, and well-being, but also those of our heirs, is not new. The Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy stated that in all their deliberations they should be planning for seven generations into the future. In many ways, this sustainable approach is alive and well: the values and lessons passed along through families, schools, churches and temples, and businesses help shape and strengthen the fabric of communities. In the town of Belmont, the Board of Selectmen is continuously providing guidance on decisions that help maintain our roads, water, electricity, waste pick-up, and other town services—all of which help ensure the sustainability of our town as a whole. Together, these individual, municipal, and business efforts foster a healthy, vibrant community where businesses thrive and the quality of life of its residents is high.

While these efforts have provided well for our past and present needs, the sustainability of our communities in the future is coming into question. Public demand for water and electricity outweighs available and affordable supply, and obtaining these resources for our use is becoming more tenuous. Meanwhile, cash-strapped cities and towns (Belmont included) are finding it more difficult to fund and maintain schools, building projects, and meet other vital community needs.

Sustainability at Stake

Sustainability is such a lofty and broad concept that individuals might not know how they can adapt it into their lives and into their communities. But there are many ways it can be done—and the time is ripe to take action. With global warming and other large-scale environmental problems threatening our children’s and grandchildren’s futures, it is everyone’s responsibility to do their part to minimize or eliminate these threats.

Belmont has already taken steps toward this goal. In 2001, the town adopted “A Working Vision for Belmont’s Future,” which outlined ways in which Belmont could be a healthy, safe, prosperous, and welcoming place in which to live. Among the goals outlined in the vision was becoming an “environmentally responsible community.” The town’s Vision 21 Implementation Committee established Sustainable Belmont in February 2005 to help the town carry out this part of the Vision.

Since its formation, Sustainable Belmont has been collaborating with town officials, businesses, residents, and community groups to raise awareness, encourage action, and foster a sense of

community around a wide range of environmental issues such as global warming, vehicle idling, energy efficiency, and healthy lawn care.

There has never been a more urgent time—or a more promising time—for working toward a more sustainable future. Together, we can pursue and promote actions and policies that improve the quality of life, well-being, and equity for those living today and those living seven generations from now.