

Jerry MacCleary's viewpoint: Setting principles for sustainability

With an agenda focused on Creating a Next Generation Economy for All, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development seeks to make the 10-county region a better place for everyone who lives here.

To this end, we have oriented our efforts toward achieving regional vitality. This means not only a strong economy, but also ensuring that southwestern Pennsylvania is where all people can thrive and benefit.

How can we attain all of this? How can we balance a healthy economy and a healthy quality of life? More than a year ago, this is a question the Conference asked me, as chair of the new Community and Sustainability Committee, to address.

Knowing there was no simple answer, we identified key leaders to form a diverse group of stakeholders from the business, academic, government, philanthropic and nonprofit communities to form the Community and Sustainability Committee. Diverse thinking and strong partners would be fundamental to be successful.

Everyone at the table was willing to share concerns and doubts and to listen to different viewpoints. Sometimes that meant we had to agree to disagree, but everyone was committed to working together to achieve what's best for the region. Our work was done in an honest, authentic and productive way. And because of this, we achieved alignment.



ROY ENGELBRECHT - Jerry MacCleary is a member of the Allegheny Conference Board of Directors and serves as chair of the organization's Community and Sustainability Committee.

To give us a starting point, we looked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

These goals are widely respected and credible; they are broad because sustainability does not have a rigid definition, and they provide a filter to help us narrow our focus. We examined each principle to identify areas that were not already being addressed by other organizations or other work of the Conference.

Five areas emerged as most connected to the work of our committee: affordable and clean energy; industry, innovation and infrastructure; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption; and partnerships.

The committee worked to translate these United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into five, action-oriented principles to guide our region and our work:

Principle 1: Community and individual well-being

We promote and encourage policies and practices that provide equal access to improved economic growth and quality of life for all, to ensure the long-term well-being of our communities and our residents.

Principle 2: Resource stewardship

We promote the adoption of sustainable consumption and production patterns, increased efficiency and minimized resource use and waste in all its forms (i.e., land, water and air), and actions that contribute to positive improvements to the four P's of people, planet, place and performance.

Principle 3: Clean energy

We promote and encourage policies and practices that increase access to more affordable, reliable, sustainable and clean energy for all.

Principle 4: Innovation and technology

We promote further funding and deployment of innovation and technology that increases the sustainability of our industries, improves the resiliency of our infrastructure and addresses factors that contribute to climate change.

Principle 5: Partnerships to achieve the principles

We encourage and participate in cross-sector and inclusive partnerships to achieve the region's sustainable development goals.

While each business and organization will customize its approach to sustainability, these principles form a solid foundation. We have already begun relying on them as a frame through which to view our work, and we are committed to playing an enhanced role in supporting efforts of our partners in this space.

Moving forward, Principle 5 will guide our success. We're committed to supporting the important sustainability work of our partners. The goal is not to recreate, but to collaborate and scale up. Join us in making this region a vibrant, inclusive and sustainable place to live.

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