

Introduction

People need to recognize that their actions have consequences, although the results are not readily visible.

—Ernest Duquet, founding President
Cape Cod Center for Sustainability

The frog does not drink up the pond in which it lives.

—Native American Proverb

The mission for the Cape Cod Center for Sustainability is “to promote long-term sustainability through the integration and nurturing of the social, natural and economic environments to achieve a better life for those living and working on Cape Cod, both now and in the future.”

This report presents information tracking Cape Cod’s progress toward sustainability. It was prepared by the Sustainability Indicators Council under the auspices of the Cape Cod Center for Sustainability. It is designed as a decision-making tool for use by individuals, educators, and local and regional officials.

■ Sustainability

Sustainability was first defined in 1987 by the UN’s Bruntland Commission as “meeting the needs of the present without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their needs”. The definition spoke not only to the wise use of social, natural and economic resources today, but also to the long-term impacts that exist and the responsibility we bear to future generations for the management of those resources.

Since 1987, hundreds of organizations have addressed these issues and helped define sustainability in local, regional, state, national and international terms. It has become clear that the conventional method of measuring the “success” or “vitality” of a community or region relying solely on economic indicators is not adequate. Sustainability projects worldwide focus on the need to bring economic and environmental indicators into the decision-making progress, thus providing a broad-based and holistic picture of the health of the community. The growing number of communities engaging in sustainability projects speaks to its relevance to a community’s health and to individuals’ everyday lives.

In these times of economic, political and environmental change, when our future and so much around us is uncertain, it is appropriate to think about the legacy we are leaving our children and future generations. Hopefully, it will be one we can be proud of, one in which today’s decisions will not reduce tomorrow’s choices.

■ Sustainability and Cape Cod

The Cape Cod Center for Sustainability seeks to demonstrate that a sound economy, a healthy natural environment, and social justice for all are interconnected and essential to the future well-being of Cape Cod. The attainment of a sustainable future must be based on understanding and dealing with the inter-relationships among these three objectives. To accomplish its mission, the Center has offered a broad range of programs to encourage Cape Codders to think in a future-oriented mode and realize that today’s actions will have consequences in the future.

The Sustainability Indicators Project grew out of the Center’s desire to define sustainability for Cape Cod, and the need to be inclusive in that process. The purpose of Cape Cod’s Sustainability Indicators Project is to track and evaluate our progress toward achieving a sustainable community for the long term using indicators in various aspects of our lives.

Our Indicator Selection Criteria

1. Can the indicator be measured?
2. Does the indicator reflect a value widely held on Cape Cod?
3. Can we define a target of where we would like this indicator to be in the future?
4. Can the indicator be influenced by changes in policy or individual behavior?
5. Can the indicator, and its relevance, be understood by the community?
6. Is the indicator timely?
7. Does it provide early warning of changes?
8. Does this indicator have linkages to other social, economic and environmental issues?

The mission of the 2003 Council is “to produce and distribute a list of Barnstable County indicators to educate the general public and their elected officials about trends in specific environmental, social and economic issues and the need to address problems from an integrated, long-range perspective.”

An indicator is something measurable that highlights where we are, where we want to be, and how well we are achieving that goal. Our indicators are based on the shared values of Cape Codders, and contain linkages to one or more other systems where a change in the status of one system will affect the status of another. A good indicator helps track the health of all the systems.

■ Sustainability Indicators Council

In spring of 1997, the Center formed the Sustainability Indicators Council to guide development of a relevant set of indicators. The 1997 Council was made up of 27 members. The 2002-2003 Council is made up of 12 community leaders representing all sectors and all regions of Cape Cod.

The work of the Council has been an effective example of communication and cooperation by and among individuals and groups with divergent viewpoints, ideas, and approaches, who have come together to embrace the concept that measuring present trends is the key to determining our future. The coalescence of social, environmental and economic approaches jointly deals with the issue of sustainability, evidenced by this report and graphically represented on our front cover. It is our sincere hope that through this process the concentric portions of the three circles will continue to grow and expand.

■ Sustainability Indicators Project

In the fall of 1998, the Sustainability Indicators Council developed an initial set of 39 indicators, and public outreach efforts were conducted prior to selecting the final 12. In 1999, the first Sustainability Indicators Report was published.

In 2002, the Sustainability Indicators Council began meeting again to update and expand the 1999 report. The Council broke into three subcommittees, one each for social, environmental and economic indicators. Each subcommittee held meetings with focus groups that provided insights into choosing and gathering data for effective indicators. After evaluating the previous indicators (both initial and final) in light of these meetings, some were dropped, some were changed to provide more accurate data and analysis, and new ones were added.

The 2003 report contains 15 indicators. These indicators were compiled by members of the Council with significant assistance from the organizations, community representatives and individuals identified in the “Acknowledgements.” They present data about today’s Cape Cod. In many cases, they also include historical data. But in cases where historical data are not available or is difficult to come by, this report will serve as a baseline resource. Sources of data and information for each indicator are listed in the “Sources and Endnotes” at the end of the report.

■ Indicators to Action

The 1999 and 2003 Sustainability Indicators Reports have been created in order to give Cape Cod a comprehensive picture of our region’s health and vitality—to bring social, environmental and economic issues together in one place and track them over time.

Synergy: 1) The interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.

Connection: 1) The state of being connected. 2) One that connects; a link. 3) An association or relationship.

—*The American Heritage
College Dictionary*

The 15 social, economic and environmental indicators tracked by this report give a broad picture of sustainability on Cape Cod. The report highlights trends, both positive and negative. It also identifies many of the connections among social, environmental and economic issues, and provides insight on the relationships between each indicator and the Cape’s sustainability—i.e., if the numbers change, what does it mean for the long-term health of Cape Cod?

Two additional features of the report are noteworthy. For each indicator, individuals, communities and decision-makers are provided with recommendations for positive actions they can take toward making our region sustainable. In addition, each indicator includes a list of its most important goals in the first sidebar. These lists refer back to the set of goals and touchstones identified as intrinsic to a sustainable Cape Cod in “An Uncertain Future” at the beginning of this report. By connecting individual indicators to economically, socially and environmentally sustainable outcomes, these lists suggest areas where concerted action might yield progress on several fronts.

“Community . . . community:

*Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with
passion without having the words stick in our throat.*

Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us.

*Eyes will light up when we enter; voices will celebrate
with us whenever we come into our own power.*

*Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work
that needs to be done.*

*Arms to hold us when we falter; a circle of healing, a
circle of friends.*

Someplace we can be free.”

—*Starhawk*

(21st Century American poet and community activist)