

*The 2007 Summit for a Sustainable Tennessee*  
by: Chris Ford and John McFadden

NASHVILLE – More than two hundred citizens representing at least eighty Tennessee communities, organizations and agencies gathered at Lipscomb University in Nashville on November 15, 16 and 17, 2007 to begin a multi-phase, year-long process of crafting the state's first sustainability agenda. Assembled under the banner "Many Voices. A Common Vision", the participants spent three days in working meetings outlining key issues and goals and discussing strategies and tactics for sharing resources and information. The meeting, titled "The Summit for a Sustainable Tennessee", was organized by the Tennessee Environmental Council (the Council) and Tennessee Conservation Voters (TCV) with help from dozens of volunteers from several local and statewide organizations.

The goal of the Summit and the ongoing visioning process is to develop a working plan for raising Tennessee's overall quality of life by making the state more sustainable. Two closely related, over-arching themes emerged from the Summit: the need to raise public awareness about the urgency of responding quickly and boldly to growing environmental threats to the state's climate, water, air, wildlife and natural landscape and the overwhelming economic benefits in store for the thousands of Tennessee households, communities and companies that result from a shift to more sustainable products, policies and practices.

During the Summit for a Sustainable Tennessee, scores of scientists, engineers, ecologists, executives, farmers, educators, activists, organizers, students and other interested citizens examined issues and opportunities related to clean energy, natural infrastructure, healthy communities, quality growth and sustainable design and development. A wide range of creative approaches were proposed at the Summit focusing around the idea of "sustainability" as a source for economic opportunity and community vitality.

Among the most popular strategies and tactics:

- *providing creative market incentives for private business and consumers making more sustainable choices*
- *developing a major statewide public information campaign directed at business, consumers and students emphasizing the many practical benefits of greener lifestyles and practices*
- *providing incentives and public-private partnerships to encourage investment in and development of denser, more walkable, transit-oriented communities*
- *promoting healthier, more locally-sourced food systems throughout the state*

- *working to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy sources as the core components of the state's energy plan*
- *purchasing and preserving up to a million acres of greenspace across the state, beginning with land along the state's Mississippi corridor*

Council Executive Director John McFadden spoke for both organizations when he said, "The Council and TCV wish to thank and congratulate the eighty-plus organizations and agencies who participated in the first annual Summit for a Sustainable Tennessee. It was an historic gathering that set the stage for a level of statewide cooperation and collaboration that is unprecedented in Tennessee history. The Summit is all about the opportunity for change."

A top-level leadership committee made up of officers from more than twenty Tennessee organizations agreed at the Summit that Council staff would take the lead in planning and promoting subsequent events and Regional Opportunity Forums. University of Tennessee Knoxville was named the site of the first regional event, which took place on January 24, 2008. Additional forums were held in Chattanooga on June 12 and, most recently, in Memphis on September 19 and 20.

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