

***The Transition to Sustainability in a Rapidly  
Changing Region:  
Applying Ecological Economics in the Hudson  
Valley of New York***

*Symposium Coordinated by Sustainable Hudson Valley  
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Sustainability is coming of age as a guiding concept for business practice and local development strategy. But, for that vision to be operationalized in a reliable and durable manner, it must be reflected in policy, market signals, and the political process.

This session explores the system of environmental, social and economic policy making and the state of progress in the application of ecological economics, using New York's rapidly changing Hudson River Valley as a case study. Opening with a discussion of system constraints in the historic approaches to property rights and land use decisionmaking, the symposium then reviews best practices in the use of decision tools including sustainability indicator systems and participatory planning processes. Cases in green building and siting, biodiversity protection, economic development, historic and cultural preservation follow. Their common theme is building on natural, social and economic assets to create stronger communities.

The day ends with a Round Table of the presenters along with invited members of the USSEE addressing the key question, "How do we move forward in the mainstreaming of ecological economics principles and tools to achieve sustainable development?"

## **Session 1 Panel: The Big Picture: Systems of Systems in Virtuous Cycles**

The New "Home Economics:" "Tragedy" in the Suburbs  
Ann Davis, Marist College

In the Hudson Valley, historic approaches to property rights have given rise to a particular "tragedy of the commons" characterized by rising inequality, spatial segregation, and uncontrolled resource utilization. The presumed separation of the economy and governance, combined with the actual overlap of economic and political institutions, has created a systemic gridlock that undermines effective policymaking to manage the commons of land and other natural resources. Ultimately, commercial and residential development may be hampered by the degradation of resources, even in the face of attractive significant short run financial gains. This paper proposes an alternative definition of property rights to more effectively protect the commons as well as private property. It identifies process conditions for creating a new property regime, including collaboration, commitment, and foresight. Drawing on case material internationally and emerging scholarship in the U.S., it identifies possible models for developing a new, equitable property regime that better protects the commons and long term economic viability.

Sustainability Indicators – Meaningful Measures for Community Change  
Maureen Hart, Sustainable Measures Inc.

A common business adage is that „what gets measured gets managed.“ A less often voiced but equally true corollary is that what isn,t measured is often ignored. A key constraint to community sustainability, at the local, regional, or national level, is a lack of a commonly used, readily understood method for measuring progress towards sustainability. This presentation will 1) briefly describe existing barriers to developing common methods for measuring sustainable community development, 2) review existing models and best practices for effective community sustainability indicator systems, and 3) outline possible next steps to developing a widely used and excepted format for community sustainability reporting.

Open Economy Strategies for Sustainability:  
Diagnosis of Dilemmas and Design of Interventions  
Kathi Vian, Ph.D.Director, Ten Year Forecast, Institute for the Future

Underlying many of the challenges to local and global sustainability are so-called social dilemmas—the kinds of tragedies of the commons that arise when seemingly rational actions by individuals add up to a situation where everyone is worse off. In the past decade, we have seen the spread three key cultural behaviors that can address these dilemmas in new ways: rapid social networking, emergent self-organization, and cooperative strategies. Together, these are defining a new open economy (with open-source production, new commons, and peer-to-peer distribution). Working with leading thinkers in this area, including Howard Rheingold (Smart Mobs) and Peter Kollock (UCLA, Department of Sociology), the Institute for the Future has developed a systematic process for diagnosing the dilemmas inherent in situations like the current ecological crisis, and for designing interventions using open economy principles. In this session, we will provide an overview of this Open Economy Toolkit, with an example of its application to sustainability strategies, presented in the context of the Institute’s long-term forecast of the development of eco-science.

## **Session 2 Panel: Applying System Strategies**

Mobilizing Change Agents for the Green Economy: The Case of Ulster County

Melissa Everett, Sustainable Hudson Valley and Jennifer Schwartz, Ulster County Planning Board

The ability of communities to transform themselves and to create viable, self-generating economies is tied to many aspects of social and cultural capital including the existence of shared norms, communication channels, cultures of reciprocity, “think groups,” external and internal network qualities, and more. Communities can draw out – or undermine – these factors by their choices of frameworks for understanding community systems. A county in rapid flux, Ulster County in New York’s Hudson River Valley is showcased in this case study presentation. Historic approaches to political decision making and resource allocation through kinship and exchange networks are giving way to more inclusive efforts at transparent, stakeholder-driven public processes, reflected in a current mobilization to implement a “sustainable” strategic economic development plan. Whether these new civic and social forms can embody the degree of trust, communication, shared learning and collaborative leadership necessary to create a distinctive, viable local economy may depend on the explanatory frameworks and negotiation of power relationships that participants bring to the task.

Beds, Biscuits and Birds: Balancing Development, Habitat and Wetlands in the Upper Hudson Valley  
Rene' Van Schaack, Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District

In the Northeast portion of Greene County, the Greene County Industrial Development Agency and Greene County Soil & Water Conservation District have worked together to initiate a model for the integration of local development activities and natural resource protection. In 2000, the Greene County Industrial Development Agency (GCIDA) acquired 206 acres to create the "shovel ready" Greene Business and Technology Park. By 2002, the project had made no progress due to the lack of a cohesive environmental strategy, and a private citizen filing an Article 78 suit. During the SEQR process, written comments were received from several individuals with substantial professional qualifications and knowledge of local species of concerns. In 2002, the GCIDA brought in the Greene County Soil & Water Conservation District (GCSWCD) to outreach to project opponents and to help guide the GCIDA through the state and federal permitting process. In 2003, the GCSWCD/GCIDA established a Habitat Advisory Committee (HAC) which includes the citizens which had written comments opposed to the project, as well as the one that had filed the lawsuit. The HAC also included representatives of local municipalities, planning boards, sportsmen, Audubon, NYSDEC, USFWS and other NGOs. This presentation shows how the District was in a unique position to broker trust between the contentious parties -- as a natural extension of the historical role of CDs straddling resource protection and agricultural productivity and sustainability-- and the final mitigation strategy for the proposed business park.

Nature in Fragments: Confronting Sprawl Through Enlightened Land Use Planning  
Michael W. Klemens, Metropolitan Conservation Alliance of the Wildlife Conservation Society

Dr. Klemens will focus on the mission and methodology of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Metropolitan Conservation Alliance. Dr. Klemens will discuss how the MCA's approach to biodiversity conservation realizes that biodiversity conservation and development are not necessarily at opposite ends of the spectrum. By integrating science-based information about wildlife and ecosystems into the land use planning process, it is possible for a region to maintain its ecological integrity while allowing for economic growth. Traditionally,

says Dr. Klemens “the environmental movement has been very good at saying no to new development but not necessarily good at saying how to create new developments”. In an effort to ease the environmentally devastating effects of sprawl, Dr. Klemens’ program provides the “how” by creating and disseminating tools that land use officials can use to make better informed land use decisions. Among the various tools to be discussed will be the MCA’s “Biotic Corridor” approach as well as the program’s Technical Paper Series including the *Best Development Practices* manual.

### **Session 3 Round Table: Learning Our Way Home: Applying Ecological Economics to Regional Sustainability**

*Assembled and annotated by Melissa 4/27/07*