

## Organizing steps to becoming recognized as a GreenStep City

Of Minnesota's 855 cities, approximately 500 are under 1,000 in population, 83% are under 5,000 in population, and 35 have a population over 25,000. With such a diversity of cities, no one set of process steps will fit all cities in organizing work to become a GreenStep City. Depending on your city, work may start mostly at the city staff, city council or citizen commission level and fit well into existing plans and efforts, moving later to incorporate and leverage work efforts by civic organizations. Or the impetus for implementing GreenStep best practices may start with a civic group and be mostly done by community members and community organizations, with the city council in a supportive and active role as needed.

Adapt this guide as best fits your city and the individuals who are working to make your city a GreenStep City.

### 1. Build community knowledge and interest.

- Anyone can start this: a city staff person, an interested citizen, a city commission or task force member, a mayor, city council member, business association member, civic association member, environmental or public health group, renewable energy advocate, etc.
- Determine into which category your city fits. Cities with greater capacity for making civic improvements are able and challenged to implement more best practices and "harder" actions. Answer 11 simple questions to determine whether your city is in category A, B or C.
- Become familiar with GreenStep best practices and which of them other cities in Minnesota have implemented. Determine your city category so you know the minimum number of best practices your city must have implemented to be recognized as a GreenStep City, Step Two and Step Three.
- Talk with key people and organizations in your city, discuss at existing meetings, and convene special meetings to discuss as appropriate.
- Invite, as needed, a GreenStep program representative to come visit your city and talk about GreenStep. Contact the MPCA's GreenStep Cities program coordinator to find out who might be available to visit your citizen's group, or city staff, city commission, or city council.
- Inventory completed, planned and desired best practices. Some cities find it important to prepare this inventory, at a very simple summary level or at a detailed level, before seeking a city council resolution. Consider using a student intern or community volunteer to do this, or, for a more detailed inventory, contact the MPCA's GreenStep Cities program coordinator to see if a RETAP member can help you.
- Discuss with an official city body. This could be a city council, a council committee, a city commission or task force, or some other group charged by city government to work on civic improvement.

### 2. Approve a city council resolution to work toward GreenStep Cities recognition.

- Use the sample resolution and modify it as needed in discussion with city council members or in a city council committee meeting.
- Introduce a resolution to the city council. Depending on the practice in your city, more or less detail will have to be spelled out in the proposed resolution.
- Specify in the resolution – or direct city staff to determine later – (1) a GreenStep coordinator for your city (the coordinator could be an existing city staff person or entity, or task force, or an appointed community member), and (2) a short list of which GreenStep best practices the city initially plans to implement (to help the GreenStep program better understand city interests).

- E-mail your resolution/contact information. This will allow the MPCA to set up a web account on the GreenStep Cities web site for your city. If your resolution names a city entity, please include a contact person's name, phone, e-mail and postal address, which will appear on the public web site.
- *Congratulations! You are now recognized as a **Step One GreenStep City!** Use Step One recognition artwork/materials located on your city log-in page to let others know of your accomplishment.*

### 3. Post initial information on the GreenStep Cities web site.

- Enter simple information: city population, approximate number of city staff, city category, city web site address, names of any participating township(s) / school district(s), and contact information for one person who will serve as your city's GreenStep contact.
- Provide brief detail on best practices previously implemented. For example, if you check off the action *Promote biking, walking and transit* under the *Mobility Options* best practice, tell us:
  - How many, for example, bike racks the city/the city and its partners installed
  - A web address on your city web site (if any) that talks about your efforts (or upload a planning document you may have used, such as an area bike plan)
  - Any success measures (such as: bike path use increased 20% during 2005)
  - Any key partner(s) you may have worked with (for example, a local bike rack company)
  - The name and e-mail of the person most knowledgeable about this accomplishment so that other cities seeking to replicate your success can learn from it.

Some cities may find it easier/cheaper to use a student intern to gather and post this information. Contact the MPCA's GreenStep Cities program coordinator to see if a RETAP member can help you with the inventory and posting.

### 4. Get organized to begin work on implementing best practices.

- As needed, educate city staff and officials about sustainability. Sustainability may not be the term used by your city, but current actions the city may be taking to increase city resiliency to financial pressures, to increase livability and to prevent future environmental costs certainly fall under the sustainability focus of GreenStep Cities and should be understood by elected and appointed officials and staff.
- Convene a small working group. The GreenStep contact/coordinator for the city should call together key people within city government (and outside of city government as appropriate at this stage) to make decisions such as the following. This group might be an existing or new city staff green team or an existing or new citizen commission or task force:
  - How to work with existing city/civic groups and initiatives to implement best practices
  - Who should be on a GreenStep steering committee (which could be an existing group), what this committee needs to do (e.g., review progress on implementing best practices), and how often it needs to meet
  - How often the GreenStep steering committee should report back what to the city council
- Specify implementation action(s) and a few lead people. A GreenStep steering committee – which could be the initial small working group or a city commission – should take the short list of best practices the city identified in its resolution for implementation, and identify:
  - Which specific action(s) under each best practice will be investigated/worked on
  - Which people - “best practice leads” - should prepare a simple work plan for how to implement the action(s)
- Prepare a simple work plan for implementing selected best practice. Have best practice leads – these could be non-paid community members, or members of a city environmental commission -

draft a simple work plan. The work plan should specify exactly (1) *who* would do (2) *what* and (3) *when* using (4) *what* types of resources (money, volunteers, county help, utility funds, etc.). Be alert to how *proposing slight changes in what a city is already planning to do can accomplish a best practice action*. GreenSteps is mostly about doing things smarter and spending money that returns multiple benefits, not about spending more money or finding grant money. The following should make preparing the work plan easier:

- Review implementation tools on the GreenStep web site for each selected best practice action, which often include case studies, to refine how you will implement the best practice action in your city
  - Talk with city staff/officials
  - Talk with others from the community
  - Talk with trusted resource organizations, including consultants and utilities
  - Contact the MN GreenStep Cities best practice advisor for the relevant best practice as needed
  - Read on the GreenStep web site how other cities have implemented a selected best practice action, and contact the people listed there to learn more information
- Present the best practice plans to your GreenStep steering committee and to a city body or to the city council as appropriate.

#### 5. Begin working to implement best practices.

- Keep everyone moving and celebrate success. At periodic meetings of your GreenStep steering committee, have best practice leads report on accomplishments, barriers, and next steps. Work together to overcome barriers, change plans as needed, and find ways to accomplish multiple actions through a common strategy.
  - Clarify, as needed, what constitutes completing an action with the MPCA GreenStep program coordinator. For example, an administrative directive is probably substantially equivalent to a city council-adopted policy, but feel free to make a phone call to clarify an issue such as this.
  - Briefly describe completed best practice actions on the GreenStep web site as you did in step 3 above when first entering information onto the GreenStep Cities web site.
- *Congratulations! When you have implemented any 4, 6 or 8 best practices (depending on your city category) you are now recognized as a **Step Two GreenStep City!***

#### 6. Keep on working and be recognized for higher steps.

- Implementing a particular best practice action may take months or years. The GreenStep Cities program requirements have been set with the expectation that any city can implement 8, 12 or 16 best practices (depending on city category) and become a Step Three GreenStep City within three years. But implementing the required best practices and the minimum number of optional best practices might take some cities longer or shorter than three years, depending on the different assets and capabilities of each city. Program requirements will be reviewed and adjusted carefully each year to keep the implementation actions for best practices challenging yet doable.
- Be alert to rare opportunities. Projects like street repaving, waste water plant breakdowns, or receiving a grant for housing loans each afford a city the chance to complete multiple best practice actions at once. Be ready with plans for making the most of these opportunities.
- Check back with the city council as needed. Ongoing or planned best practice implementation may fit in with new city efforts and can be shaped in discussion with the council.

- Report yearly to community members on GreenStep accomplishments. This is a required action for all cities under Best Practice #24. Use various media, sample reporting forms on your city's log-in page, and existing communication vehicles and venues.
- As your work proceeds, give us feedback on the program. Let us know how we can make the program materials aid you better in implementing actions.
- *Congratulations! When you have implemented 8, 12 or 16 best practices (depending on your city category, and including a few required best practices) you are now recognized as a **Step Three GreenStep City!***

#### **7. GreenStep Cities Step Four.**

- Program requirements will be developed during 2012, as we learn from cities during 2010 and 2011, to challenge recognized GreenStep Cities to implement more actions and be recognized for these accomplishments. We think GreenStep best practices will result in multiple benefits for your city and that you'll want to continuously work on best practices that make your city more sustainable.