

The grass will always be greener in Johnson County—in many ways.

With nationally recognized schools and libraries, ample public parks and open spaces, low crime rates, a healthy local economy, good neighborhoods, and an excellent quality of life, Johnson County has a lot to offer that makes others green with envy.

And on the green topic, Johnson County government has long been a regional and national leader in “green” programs and practices, recognizing the importance of conserving our natural resources for future generations and supporting innovative sustainable-development strategies.

The growing importance of sustainability, both in terms of the environment and as a community, was one of the main messages I presented in my 2008 State of the County Address last month. The message was simple: Going green is better for all of us, for our children, and for our children’s children.

Participating as a founding member and leader in the Sustainable Skylines Initiative, the Green Region Framework, and the Blue Skyways Partnership, Johnson County remains committed to building a more environmentally sustainable metropolitan community through a partnership of prominent business, government, and civic organizations.

Johnson County has operated a free Household Hazardous Collection Program since mid-1993. Last year that program received more than 250,000 pounds of materials, including household chemicals, paints, tires, and oil, keeping the items from the landfill and recycling most materials. Since it began 15 years ago, the program has processed more than 3.1 million pounds of household hazardous materials.

More recently, Johnson County adopted a new Solid Waste Management Plan that encourages citizens to reduce yard and household wastes going to the landfill and increase their recycling efforts. The plan also sets in motion how and where the county will dispose of its future solid waste when the Johnson County landfill closes in the foreseeable future.

Other highlights of the county’s ongoing commitment to sustainability:

- Spearheading an annual Ozone Reduction Campaign, now entering its fifth year, to reduce harmful ozone levels. Last year’s efforts improved county air quality by eliminating more than 250,000 vehicle miles traveled and preventing more than 106 tons of air pollution. In the previous four years of the campaign, more than 391 tons of air pollution have been kept out of the air that all residents share.

- Committing to lowering Johnson County’s levels of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane, and other pollutants, by 80 percent by the year 2050.

- Adding 38 gas/electric hybrid vehicles to the county’s fleet. These vehicles consume less gas, saving \$141,930 in fuel costs since 2004 and reducing pollution by almost 2,000 tons since 2004.

- Constructing the award-winning, nationally recognized Sunset Drive Office Building, which set a new standard for the county’s commitment to sustainable facilities. The Sunset building uses about 40 percent less energy than the Johnson County Administration Building, which was constructed in 1992 in downtown Olathe.

Sustainability remains a central value of Johnson County government. The goal? To ensure that future generations enjoy a quality of life characterized by environmental

beauty, economic and job opportunity, and resource abundance.

It is important to ensure these are not random actions, but part of a countywide and regional strategy that benefits *all* residents. With increasing awareness of a potential regional air quality crisis and the effects of greenhouse gases, it is clear that the decisions made in the next five years about the county's and region's environment will influence the direction of our shared community over the next 50 years.

It is also clear that we all share important roles toward sustainability. In doing so, we can use best practices for conservation, identify cooperative opportunities with other jurisdictions, and advance public awareness and, more importantly, public participation.

A proverb says, "We have not inherited the earth from our forefathers; we have borrowed it from our children."

If we commit to sustainable practices, we will be proud of the Community of Choice that future generations will inherit.

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