

The City of Dunedin Is Recognized for Its Commitment to the Environment

by Valerie Lane

Located next to the Gulf of Mexico, Dunedin, a city of approximately 38,000 people just north of Clearwater, is famous for its many special events and its eclectic downtown area. Now, the city also is known as one of the first local governments in Florida to be certified as “green.”

Dunedin recently earned the designation as a green city from the Florida Green Building Coalition, a non-profit corporation that, among other things, certifies cities and counties as “green local governments.” Dunedin is the third municipality in Florida to receive the prestigious designation of a “green local government.”

The Florida Green Local Government Standard for Cities and Counties is one of five green building standards offered by the coalition. The standard focuses on improving local governments’ environmental performance in the areas of energy, water, air, land and waste. The standard checklist provides a method to collect, document and evaluate a local government’s internal environmental practices, incentives, ordinances and educational activities that aim to improve the environment. (See page 29 for more information about the Florida Green Local Government Standard.)

Dunedin has been on the path to becoming a green city for some time. At the direction of the City Commission, city staff and the Committee on Environmental Quality researched the Florida Green Building Coalition program. In September

2006, the commission decided the program was worth pursuing.

The Committee on Environmental Quality is an advisory committee composed of city residents that provides recommendations to the City Commission, the city manager and his staff. The group also supported the establishment of a new sustainability coordinator position, and in August 2007 I was hired to fill it. With guidance and support from

Douglas Hutchens, Public Works & Utilities Department director, and Don Ross, Solid Waste Division director, I began the task of documenting the city’s efforts as it related to the Florida Green Building Coalition certification program with the goal of certification by the end of 2007.

Because the green local government program and the resulting documentation are so comprehensive, the application/certification process consumed a considerable amount of staff time, but the time was definitely well spent.

Many policies, such as the city’s landscaping ordinance, its policy for purchasing Energy Star computer equipment, and its septic system replacement ordinance, already were in place, so the certification process provided a nice snapshot of what the city already had accomplished. The process also showed where the city could do better and served as a roadmap for instituting new environmental programs.



What makes this certification really special is that it is the result of the work of so many employees and residents.

Residents are always offering ideas on how to improve the programs and suggesting better ways to do business. As sustainability coordinator, I appreciate all the citizens who participate in our conservation programs and offer input for improvement.

Dunedin continues to look for new opportunities to increase efficiencies and conserve resources. In fact, just after the certification was awarded by the Florida Green Building Coalition, the city switched to biodiesel for some of its city fleet. It also is actively promoting the city's business and multi-family recycling services.

The city wanted to share some of the money-saving ideas and technologies with its residents as well as spread the message of sustainability across the entire community, so it started offering free seminars. The Sustainability Seminar Series is intended to educate the community about timely topics related to sustainability and the environment. Attendance is intentionally limited to about 50 citizens to give the audience a chance to ask thought-provoking and policy-related questions and get answers from local experts.

Energy conservation was chosen as the topic for the first seminar in the series. Attendees learned about various incentives offered through the local utility company and how they can save money on their energy bill. To reinforce the message of the seminar, each attendee was given a compact fluorescent light bulb, or CFL, to install at home so they could start saving energy right away.

The seminars are promoted in multiple ways, including posting seminar flyers at the Community Center, Senior Center and City Hall. The seminars also are listed on the city's events calendar and its local TV station and Web site. Local newspapers typically will help with promotion as well.

Response from the seminars has been very positive, and most people who attend one seminar want to find out about others. Keeping an ongoing list of prior attendees' contact information also is a useful marketing tool. Reminders are sent to previous seminar attendees, then the message typically continues to spread by word of mouth.

It is important to have seminars that are interesting to your community. City employees ask for topic ideas every chance they get and do their

best to find knowledgeable speakers. The topic of pond maintenance was suggested by a resident who was confused about how to improve the water quality of the pond in her neighborhood. Other residents want to know about recycling and why there isn't more of it. Still other upcoming topics include a seminar on backyard composting in which residents will get a free compost bin.

Most seminars are given in the city's LEED-certified "green" Community Center, which offers residents and staff an opportunity to see a green building and sustainable development firsthand.

A strong follow-up component is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of the seminars in fostering behavior change. By being proactive with outreach to residents, staff can provide technical assistance and offer resources to facilitate behavior change. The key is keeping it convenient and interesting.

The "green city" designation was the culmination of the hard work and forward thinking of many city employees and residents and has increased community interest in the environment.

For more information on Dunedin's Sustainability Program and "green" initiatives, visit the city's Web site at www.dunedingov.com and click on "Sustainability Program."

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