

Lake Macquarie City Council

Sustainable Neighbourhood Program

Reducing Lake Macquarie's ecological footprint, neighbourhood by neighbourhood

"Sustainability is the aim, community action is the answer, and citizen engagement is the method for promoting change"

1. What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is about making sure that our natural resources such as water, coal, oil, fuel, timber, and food sources, etc, do not run out for future generations. It means ensuring there are enough natural resources for everyone around the world, forever.

Sustainability embraces community participation; and is achieved by people planning and working together to reduce our impact on the environment.

Elements of sustainability:

- A healthy, caring, well connected community
- A healthy, balanced, stable environment
- A healthy, balanced, sustainable economy
- A management system that embraces community, business, and government participation in making decisions, built on integrity and good manners

People contribute to sustainability at all levels of society: from individual, to household, to precinct, to neighbourhood, to city, to region, to nation, to planet.

2. What is the Sustainable Neighbourhood Program?

The Sustainable Neighbourhood Program has been developed in recognition that cooperation between all levels of government and citizens is required to reduce the ecological footprint of our City. Council is making changes to its business operations to reduce its own ecological footprint, and at the same time creating a range of opportunities to work with residents and business to reduce the entire City footprint.

The Sustainable Neighbourhood Program provides support to communities to plan, through local Sustainable Neighbourhood Groups, and make changes that will reduce their ecological footprint - neighbourhood by neighbourhood, contributing to an overall City-wide reduction. Neighbours will decide how they can contribute to sustainability as individuals and as a group, with support from Council and other networks over the next ten years.

3. How is a Sustainable Neighbourhood Group created?

The process of planning for change, and creating a Sustainable Neighbourhood Group generally involves the following stages:

- **Initial Group is established.** Council staff works with individuals and/or members of established community groups to organise and facilitate a series of three community workshops. The aim of these workshops is to engage interest and commitment from the broader community to take part in a process to improve neighbourhood sustainability.
- **Community Workshops.** Participation in the workshop process will result in development of a community vision, and a collective understanding of the particular neighbourhood including its strengths, challenges, resources, neighbourhood connections, and opportunities for change. Through involvement in the workshops, participants will identify their future level of involvement in the Sustainable Neighbourhood process. Individuals may decide to be part of an organising committee (Sustainable Neighbourhood Group), to take part in community activities, to be kept informed of ongoing activities and events, or to have no further involvement.
- **Sustainable Neighbourhood Group.** Members of this group will develop a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan (SNAP) and drive achievement of the actions it identifies. Council staff work alongside this group to facilitate the development of the SNAP.
- **Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan.** The SNAP details the passions of that community and their wishes for the future, the particular issues that are important to them, the skills and resources that exist in the neighbourhood, and the actions/activities they will undertake. The information in the SNAP comes from workshop participation and other input from the neighbourhood such as existing programs, surveys, and discussions with neighbours. The SNAP contains the collective aims of those involved in the process. The SNAP will be launched and available to community members for comment. The Sustainable Neighbourhood Group may decide to put their SNAP before Council for endorsement, although this step is optional.
- **The Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan is implemented.** Members of the Sustainable Neighbourhood Group are responsible for implementing the SNAP. It is expected that many people in the community will volunteer to take part in particular activities to improve sustainability in their community; however, they may not have the time to attend ongoing meetings and coordinate activities. Members of the Sustainable Neighbourhood Group will coordinate the implementation of the plan over time, and will be the conduit between residents and Council staff on matters that are included in the SNAP. Members of established Sustainable Neighbourhood Groups will be asked to mentor at least one newly forming Group in the City.
- **Evaluation of the Sustainable Neighbourhoods Program.** The Sustainable Neighbourhoods program is based on the belief that collective action at the neighbourhood level will result in a measurable reduction in the ecological footprint of the City. It is founded on the understanding that the process of working together to achieve mutually desired aims will also build stronger and mutually respectful working relationships between government and citizens, within the fabric of each community. Council will facilitate an ongoing and open evaluation process of the Sustainable Neighbourhoods Program in conjunction with participants.

3. Objectives

The primary aim of the Sustainable Neighbourhoods program is to contribute to the reduction of the City-wide positive impact on the environment by working at the neighbourhood level to promote opportunities for local action to create sustainable outcomes that will:

- reduce the ecological footprint of the City
- build strong and resilient neighbourhood connections
- improve our collective understanding of the environmental systems, strengths, challenges, aspirations and resources in the Lake Macquarie community

- improve and protect our natural resources, particularly with respect to: water (both quality and conservation), urban bushland, backyard ecosystems, creeks, urban wildlife, erosion and sediment control;
- improve the sustainability performance of households and individuals in our neighbourhood, particularly with respect to: overall resource consumption, effective waste management, chemical use, energy conservation, and water conservation;
- increase preparedness in the community to prevent and respond to threats from the environment, including natural disasters, environmental health hazards, and the impacts of climate change.

4. How will Council support the Sustainable Neighbourhood Program?

Council will provide assistance to communities to take part in the Sustainable Neighbourhood Program. This may include:

- Providing the framework and resources to host three community workshops
- Undertaking research, providing information, and documentation to assist with the development of Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plans
- Assisting with resourcing and coordination for the launch of the Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plans
- Assisting with grant applications, providing skills and expertise, advertising, and media promotions etc for particular activities
- Assisting the Sustainable Neighbourhood Groups to establish sound governance arrangements
- Assisting the Group to mentor a new Sustainable Neighbourhood Group in a different neighbourhood area
- Resourcing the evaluation framework and documentation of outcomes for the Sustainable Neighbourhoods Program

5. Our Approach to Creating Sustainable Neighbourhoods

The Sustainable Neighbourhood Program is based on the following principles or values:

- **Shared responsibility:** The collective experience, expertise and efforts of the group is far superior to the experience, expertise and efforts of the individual
- **Everything is possible:** Individuals will take action on issues that matter to them when they have ownership of the process and are committed to the end result
- **Collaboration and inclusion:** Creating processes whereby every voice is important in creating a shared future
- **Connections and relationships:** Promoting cooperative relationships between people or groups, by strengthening community networks, and creating opportunities for citizens to participate in public life

6. Developing a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan

This flowchart below, shows the basic process we follow to assist a community to develop a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan (SNAP).

