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Sustainability at the State Level

Strengths & Weaknesses



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Background: The NJ Sustainable State Institute

- Outcome of a state sustainability project carried out by NJ Future
- Focused on developing goals and indicators
- Indicators released and formally adopted by NJ via Executive Order in 1999
- Indicator values published 1999 and 2000.
- NJ Sustainable State Institute funded by legislature in 2002 as anchor for goals and indicators
- Non-advocacy, non-political
- Affiliated with NJIT and Rutgers

Goals and Indicators

- Relate to all three axes of sustainability
 - economy, environment, society
- Forty one indicators related to eleven goals
- State has adopted targets for one third of the indicators
- Full detail at www.njssi.net

Why a sustainable *STATE*?

- We can track sustainability-related issues at the state level – data available
- Ability to achieve some sustainability goals is an outcome of state policy, e.g. voter registration, education, pollution control, wetlands regulation
- State policies influence how we contribute to global sustainability goals, e.g. climate change

State government actions

- When there is a commitment to specific goals, the state government can take action effectively
- NJ example – smart growth
- All public agencies are reviewing their program, actions, and regulations to realign them with smart growth objectives – encouraging development in target areas, discouraging it in pristine ones. Integrated approach.

Local limits on state action

Municipalities control most key decisions:

- Property taxes
- Zoning
- Infrastructure and building permits
- Schools
- Etc.

Municipalities motivated by revenue needs
rather than state policy goals

Elements beyond local control

- Traffic congestion
- Negative externalities from developments in adjacent municipalities
- Interjurisdictional competition for development that maximizes net revenue – e.g. warehouses, senior citizen complexes, shopping malls

Problems of local control

- Small jurisdictions make it impossible to solve some NJ problems – no economies of scale
- Competition among jurisdictions is inefficient
- Prisoners' dilemma problems created by excessive local control

Regional limits on state action

Areas where state has more impact if policies are regional:

- Energy efficiency and market transformation
- Renewable portfolio standards – risk of utilities leaving the state if NJ is stricter than others
- Auto emissions standards
- GHG emissions standards

Conclusion

For each issue of concern, we must understand:

- What each level of government can influence
- Where states need to coax or convince local government
- Where states need to collaborate with each other