

# 2012 Green Team Continues City's Journey to Sustainability

By Pegi Schulz

Sustainability is a word familiar to most Riverwest residents. Whether it's installing a rain barrel, better roof insulation or solar panels, recycling to the max, buying locally whenever possible, or even keeping bees, our neighbors likely are at the top of their game when it comes to living in Earth-friendly ways. But that's on a neighborhood level. Is it possible for the city of Milwaukee as a whole to take up the sustainability challenge?

Mayor Tom Barrett firmly believes it is. Toward that end, he established the city's Office of Environmental Sustainability (OES). In February of this year, Barrett announced the formation of a Green Team, whose task is to come up with a comprehensive – and doable – sustainability plan.

Led by Matt Howard, Environmental Sustainability Director, the new Green Team will build on the work that's already been done since Barrett took office in 2004.

But before looking at the team's directives, it's important to understand their motivation.

## What is Sustainability?

Put very basically, sustainability means living in ways today that meet our present needs without endangering the ability of our descendants to meet their needs decades, or even centuries, from now. To move toward a sustainable future, it can help to look backward, if only briefly. It's important to realize how much of our daily lifestyles we've taken for granted.

Whether it's safe and plentiful drinking water, light and heat for our homes or affordable transportation, on a worldwide level but especially in the US, we've gone about our lives as though all those supplies were endless. We now know that's definitely not true.

The City's Green Team will embrace and build on those truths as it works to develop its plan going forward.

Mayor Barrett actually named his first Green Team shortly after his election in 2004. That group, roughly 75 stakeholders in helping the city ensure a healthy, environmentally friendly future, looked at specific actions that could be taken on a number of general topics including energy efficiency, clean energy production, storm water management and alternative fuels.

The first Green Team was charged with making recommendations in three basic, programmatic areas: (1) a smarter energy policy for city government and the city as a whole, (2) ways to better manage storm water, and (3) an all-encompassing category of methods to promote or stimulate green economic activity.

Eighty-five percent of the nearly 40

recommendations that resulted, which were published in a 2005 report, have been realized. The over-arching directive of the team, according to Howard, was to create an office of environmental sustainability in the city.

The first director for that office was appointed in 2006; Howard came on board in 2010.

"My job now is to continue implementing the first Green Team's recommendations, as well as get a little bit more strategic overall about what we're doing," Howard says.

Howard is proud of the fact that those first realized recommendations have resulted in significant cost savings for the city.

"We've seen a lot of really solid, quite frankly, bottom-line results from implementing those recommendations," Howard says.

These initial successes have helped give the 2012 Green Team an impetus to achieve their goal: to develop a sustainability plan and identify a strategic vision, along with a comprehensive set of goals and strategies to be used to achieve that vision. The plan will focus on improving environmental quality, economic strength and social equity within the city of Milwaukee.

The OES will also work cooperatively with local partners, including Milwaukee County, the Metropolitan Milwaukee Sewerage District and the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, on issues such as transportation that cross city and county borders.

The Green Team, working with OES, expects to complete the planning process in a little over one year. The process will include a series of public meetings, the first of which is anticipated in the next few months.

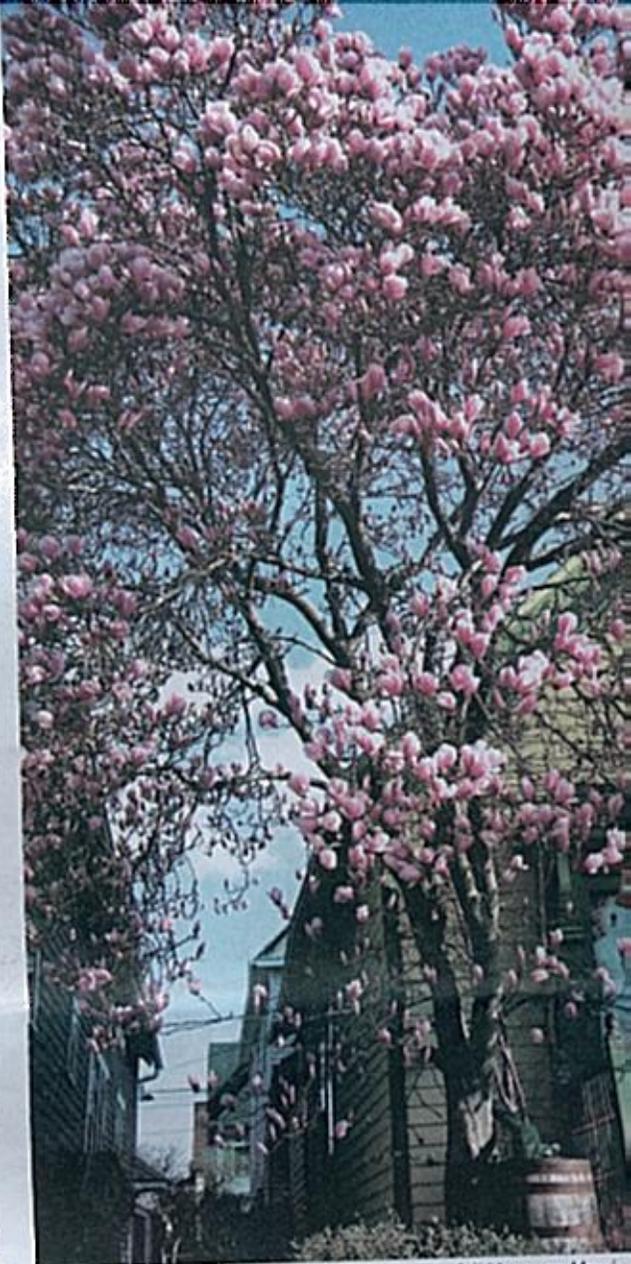
Howard stresses the importance of community input in developing the sustainability plan.

"We want the community to be involved, we want their priorities reflected in the planning process," Howard says. He expects that the public input part of the overall process will be fairly lengthy, perhaps four or five months.

## Energy Reduction Challenge

Mayor Barrett issued one of his first challenges in the area of sustainability in 2005, when he charged city government to reduce its total energy use by 15%.

"That has been one of the driving forces so far in sustainability planning," Howard says. "We've really engaged on a multi-faceted approach to reducing our energy use overall, including energy use in buildings and our vehicle fleet, with



Spring has sprung – early. This magnolia was in full bloom on March 1.



## Food and Farm Bill

Every five years or so, the US adopts a new Farm Bill. This massive piece of legislation sets the framework for what we eat, whether our food is nourishing and affordable, what assistance our society provides to feed hungry people, what crops farmers grow under what conditions, global grain and fiber markets, and how rural land is used.

This cycle is underway again as the 2008 version of the law runs its course. This round of debate over food and farm policy comes at a time of intense and growing public interest in food issues. It also comes at a time of economic uncertainty for our families, communities and nation.

The content of this bill could prove important to the urban agriculture movement. In order to be considered a "farmer," and

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