

**Blackstone Valley Tourism Council**  
**175 Main Street**  
**Pawtucket, RI 02860**  
**Results of the Green Sustainability Symposium**  
**Held on April 26, 2007**  
V2: 10/24/07  
New Commons

**Presenters:**

**Meredith Trainor** – Center for Sustainable Destinations National Geographic Society

**Michelle White** – Fairmont Hotels & Resorts

**Kristin Lamoureux** – The George Washington University

**Rebecca Mebane** – National Recycling Coalition

**Allison Rogers** – Fellow Harvard Green Campus Initiative, Miss Rhode Island 2006

**Conversation #1: Make a case ... Why bother to do this? What is the downside? What's the upside?**

**Downside**

People don't care; there is a negative image because indulgence being a part of tourism/vacation. It is restrictive, extra work, tasteless. There is a perceived negative label. Education: conflicting information?

There is a loss associated with social responsibility such as capital costs usually associated with this. Responsible business returns are long term. Competition puts responsibility at a disadvantage. Cost associated (hippie). There is a financial cost to becoming green.

Vacation mentality - have to intersect with groups having different concerns (locals vs. people wanting tourists). Confusing information and numbers in recycling, e.g., cost savings vs. cost expense.

Locally, centralized tourism is a "closed" system.

**Make a Case**

This is good stewardship for future generations.

The sense of place is the reason people are coming to the Blackstone Valley. It strengthens success of communities through the places of geo – tourism. RI is special because tourism is locally owned and the money stays here and will go back to make it better.

It is about strengthening resilient communities. In the early stages, it is market demands, that get green started and the process is to continue to build bridges. It is a matter of pro-active vs. reactive.

Opportunity to add to community integrity and expand salability. Preservation of uniqueness and competitive advantage is a reason to visit and stay. There is a clinging sense of pride.

Regulation: permitting, bureaucracy, federal, state, local timeframe.

Make clear the class distinctions: who is helped by green and who is hurt? People don't understand – don't want to be labeled. Am I making an impact? Do I demand recycling? Or, do we use peer pressure... everyone else is... pride in our state. Embracing all: residents, business owners, city and towns!!! Downside: bad publicity. Upside: strong communities = survive.

Work at educating to separate confusing information and conflicting information.

## **Conversation #2: What do we call this movement...**

Green, sustainable, geo, place-based? Responsible place making; the public doesn't use these words. Not just that type of tourist.

It has something to do with lifestyle and incorporation in daily life.

Is "green" too trendy? How do you know what this means?

Are all these words interchangeable? Do they mean the same thing? Does it need a name? Does it have to have the same name for all? Lifestyle – fad – movement, what has the most longevity? The problem with any name is that you pigeonhole yourself into one thing.

Tourists need to demand "green." Look for catalytic events – get communities from Rhode Island to come to learn about the state. Eco-tourism is a set of principles and not a marketing strategy. Diversify the marketing and do not rely on "being" a "green" destination.

Focus on conservation education (all ages) and advocacy (humans speaking on behalf of our environment). Green = foreign – how to make a movement that incorporates the public at large? How to make a name that can be understood and inviting the average consumer?

Practice what we preach; connecting the past and the future; tradition, history, heritage – ancestry's lifestyle was sustainable based on agrarian and hunting and not the industrial revolution era.

We take for granted what is in our back yard, wanting what we don't have.

It is about conserving, taking pride, supporting local merchants, farmers, etc. In effect, incorporate these ideas into daily life.

Name needs to be inclusive or appeal to all populations, cultures, demographics and support local farms and producers. Education is key. Green is a political term, inconvenient. Do not want it to be a mandate; it is not the same everywhere.

Catalytic events: Get communities from Rhode Island to come to learn in a boot camp on eco-tourism.

## NUGGETS

- We are branding a lifestyle. Maybe the word tourism isn't the right word. It's a lifestyle. Does it need a name? Rather think of it as a philosophy.
- Expose visitors to all types of attractions – malls, shopping, cultural environmental, not may focus on just one.
- Business – bottom line \$ - guests demands
- Place making looks at a destination in a holistic way. All the resources, e.g., cultural, heritage, environment and commercial are put into consideration. Maintaining a sense of place not just for tourists, but also for residents. Appeal to your own community before you reach out. Social responsibility is pride in authenticity, preservation. Rhode Island is cool; excite people about what we have.

### **Conversation #3: How do we build a business case for sustainability, green eco, geo, and so on?**

Saving money is as good as making money. Save costs and invest the savings into eco-principles.

“Branding” possibilities: vs. recyclable materials to advertise our product/property. Bio diesel is the reuse of cooking oil to heat homes, commercial properties.

Need for awareness assessment.

Start-up costs as a barrier (up front) to begin a program, which will achieve long-term savings! For businesses: easy to show cost savings of green approach (but there is a difference between short and long term perspective).

Are incentives now in place or does the government need to help incentive choices? Use market for environmental-friendly travel to contribute to a green fund? Careful how the link is made and make sure the guests know up front.

Could the government provide tax incentives for better practices/better technologies? What is the state-fed-business links? Comparative view: Canada vs. U.S. Initiatives...Canada “forced” the prime minister to take “green” positions. B.C. (Vancouver) exceptionally green on Fed Gov. grass roots, province, environmental pressure.

Corporate vs. local decision-making, top down mandate vs. bottom up decentralized management choices.

“Branding” possibilities: vs. recyclable materials to advertise our product/property.

Save the Bay, experience: creating an eco-friendly facility on a brown field site! Recovering costs? Slow, not entirely carbon – neutral loss of recovered methane (actually there are some.) Can Save the Bay find a buyer for their methane? What are the health benefits to employees of creating a low-toxic chemical-free facility?

Using full life cycle costing to reflect both the construction phase for new buildings and operating costs as well as the impact of waste on the environment. Life cycle costing can be used for purchase of environment – major capital items as well.

What are the top-down vs. bottom up initiatives in business sector? Are small businesses researching the right processes? Are they doing the audits?

Where does the authority come from to implement the greening of Rhode Island? (Carol Swenson).

Books to read: Cradle to Cradle, Bill McDonough and The Company we Keep by John Abrams. Both of these books are centered on sustainable development, which equals a longer life.

Banks/loan program, home based, education, incentives, federal/companies, environment, (recycling) expense/cost efficient, resistance, small business/ start up cost is high.

Connect with local group = % of room rate to go to group.

Branding – eco friendly (give always with money) vs. the world, supply and demand, costs will go down!!

## **NUGGETS**

- Meet public expectations: the public is now getting ahead of industry in demanding environmentally friendly choices!
- Connect waste with business losses = making an educational case and commitment focused on tourism business. How many hotels know what their waste volume is? Bottom line should be considered when selling the green concept to business.
- Mass Technology Collaborative provides design assessment grants, acquisition/construction grants, from on-site renewable energy. Businesses looking at bottom line: and can achieve savings. Government incentives can help the private sector make longer term choices, incentives should be the technology neutral.” Short-term vs. long-term view vs. private sector is in many cases. What is the private sector decision making role of government and a private decision that aims to help drive public policy?

## **Conversation #4: Defining our eco footprint using a “bottoms-up” stakeholder process... how do we do it right?**

Focus on rail with transit corridors for tourism. DOT does not do it right as RI needs trolleys, out reach for tourists and our community.

Tax credits for green.

What does it take to make a stakeholder process work? How to get folks to the table!!! New immigrants! Who is at table, unions? How do you get folks who are outside the box beyond environmental? And include, waste management and litter?

Sense of place, disseminate green tourism, quality of life congestion; motivate small business workforce/removal regeneration; foster a sense of place in age of globalization.

Given food, (transport costs), carbon impact of travel, there is a need for new modes of transportation. Community discussions, voiceless people, awareness/who are you marketing to? Who opposes community stake holder process? Use of tech info system to survey, ask etc.

Green is new/emerging: job opportunities, cool, responsible, incentives, pay the stewards; learn the money savings, inclusive/outreach, schools, media, (idol gives back).  
Make money key to message, tax credits and find common ground.

Inform and unite both wealth and poverty. Create a “rep” model for stakeholder involvement. Cool cities vs. Mayor climate protection agreement, Providence, Pawtucket, Warwick, North Kingstown. Engage the community, find your communities not just as political and commerce insiders, but those without a voice who need a voice and how do we give them a voice? This requires getting over egos and jealousy. New look at getting a set of fresh faces (mixed in with known faces) together to talk about green tourism. Diverse voices at the table give the voiceless a voice.

How do we deal with engaging stakeholders? How do we get the people who don't feel represented/voiceless to be a part of the discourse? Use education – creative, innovative. How do we get all Rhode Islanders to see they are stakeholders? How do Rhode Islanders talk about these issues? How can we relate these ideas to them to bring them to the table?

Get the whole system together to develop awareness – do farmers understand tourism impact? Small business, entrepreneurship – empower them. National – State – Local – Government Universities, communities with special interest like tour operators – technology impact.

What works? Entrepreneurs green employment use in stakeholder process. Dig into the environment, police, transportation, health, human services, community/quality of life, housing and commercial development, political, fiscal, policy, technology and internal, social and cultural, labor unions, elder population – work with every constituent.

Do community outreaches with a text-message system with a focus on green energy create jobs and strategy? Technology is fuelling travel. Waste management, carbon footprint, offsets are a temporary fix.

Develop an eco-footprint stakeholder process that asks using sustainability or the topic: what do you not like? Look to pull out 3 or 4 nuggets.

The 39 communities are too segmented. Bring all of us together via surveys? Property taxes, regionalism – planning.

There is a Newport, Providence, Pawtucket, Sturbridge and Mystic connection. Develop links and communication about the common sense of place. Engage people in dialogue.

## **NUGGETS**

- Making sure everybody is involved in the conversation.

- Develop strategy for effectively communicating issues and challenges (text messages!)
- Assess eco-footprint and make it all encompassing. How do we measure a community's entire footprint?
- New Englanders have trouble communicating – how do we connect them despite disparate identities. There is a need to coordinate and organize all components of place, economic, cultural, heritages. We need an action agenda with measurable results.

## **Conversation #5: Assessment... Where are we now? Where do we start?**

We are an eco, sustainable, geo and civic place.

Do a Rhode Island report card on recycling and the use of the garbage boat; support local farmers/producers. Focus on education before legislation.

Get the focus on indicators/outcomes. Conduct community mapping to identify benchmarks that look at what is attractive to the community. Research: what's out there, benchmark, and where are we now with yet to be set goals, 1-2-3-4.

With hotels and restaurants, do an employee survey on green terms, grass roots; keep program internal.

Determine what individuals are responsible for greening Rhode Island? At the beginning, businesses should recycle as Rhode Islanders do at home; currently it is required but they have to comply voluntarily. Help them become aware, then assess them, then do action. There must be truth in recycling.

Adopt ISO: 1401.

Do not replace everything at once (i.e. light bulbs) (financial reasons); adopt a certification program.

Small steps, set goal: in 5 years, we want to be here. Don't overwhelm will lose motivation incentive program for colleague, celebrate success.

First operations would be based on that those that go first know better than anyone in business. Create green teams, get the buy in – empower. Action plan, keep internal first, be careful how to market/rollout practices, we're just starting to manage the expectations.

Green is set as a local lifestyle standard and then educate tourists directly and indirectly, e.g., use trashcans less at beaches – carry-in – cart out. Use the Tom Sawyer effect – entice people.

Emphasis is placed on individuals as well as groups/community commitment. Monitor/set goals/report like Wisconsin – certify green orgs; prioritize, celebrate successes incentive programs.

Research what's out there. ID what can/should be done, empower/encourage action such as greening a building then moves out to community. Consider the EPA energy mark program. Highlight leaders and model programs through good PR.

Customers demanding eco-friendly practices and personal commitment.

Researches companies that reuse/have use for recyclable products.

## **Nuggets**

- Customers demand eco-friendly practices and personal commitment. Research companies that reuse/mine/have use for recyclable products.
- Conduct an employee survey to determine what they buy in conjunction to identify areas for improvement breakdown by property area for specialization use sub-committees to customize each problem. Quantify waste on a state-wide basis so that results can be measured as to who could provide information on Rhode Island and recycling trends so that in Providence, energy can be quantified.
- Smart move is making conservation a part of applicable education programs and set based on quantifiable benchmarks: industry, state, international, create buy in by vote? Conduct an analysis of the areas of most need.

## **Conversation #6: Invent...Go where no person has gone before**

Consciously “develop us” to present to both residents and visitors. Add money to do a “friend raising” tour for Rhode Island.

The 24/7 lifestyles seem to have people wanting vehicles; use alternative energy vehicles.

Start small by closing streets for high traffic during tourist season and off-season for residents. Connect to places and get them around after they get to their place.

There is a lack of money in supporting inter-modal transit. Feds, state, local – lack of coordination.

Innovative transportation ideas – connecting people to places in low-impact, energy friendly ways. Develop regionalism – Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island transporting people together. Look at Carbon footprint. 20:1 in rail vs. a car, thus, the green benefit is in mass transit. Build infrastructure for transportation across state lines. Will require an alliance of states. Excited to do something like developing an emotional and intellectual concept – get transportation structured for people to get around. Transportation has to cross state lines, to within the area. If everyone comes by car you lose the benefit!

Foster Southern New England connections and feature an alternative to carbon use. Mix: casinos, man-made attractions vs. places, place based tourism, nature, and community/city. New London, Providence and Worcester form the prosperity triangle (the Research Park Triangle in North Carolina.) Animate our sense of community, sense of place.

Created or manufactured places would open their doors and their enrollment with the communities, integrating them to be place-based. Why would you destroy what made the place great in the first place? Need to engage residents to enjoy the tourist highlights.

Make a Rhode Island Beautiful Fund. Tourism tax pays for infrastructure that “houses” tourist. Check box at hotel desk to donate \$1...highlight foot traffic – points of interest “along the way.” Focus on recruiting the right tourists...quality vs. quantity.

Why wait for the government? Start small, zip cars, “courtesy card...” Don’t rent...we’ll give you a ride... Zip car, pick up at visitors centers and CVB can be outlets...pick up/drop-off. Find all benefits of change – both big and small.

Sturbridge...Integrate...authentic...one – Epicenter is the Blackstone Valley Triangle Plymouth, intellectual emotional...residents of Newport...un-ring the bell...connect the state...South County, Newport, Providence, Northern Rhode Island. Mass transit for Rhode Island must be convenient, reliable and frequent, planned and lifestyle oriented. Transportation connects: access to and access within the destination. Start small, but link up – transportation goes from “here to there.”

## **Conversation #7: A look to the future...you are a green tourist in Rhode Island...What do you want to experience?**

Water experiences like sailing and fishing. Guided, narrative trails and walks...nature and infrastructure certification.

Arts/culture...Waterfire – how “green” is this? Local artisans! RISD practices...Cooking instructions – J&W? Size matters. You can get there from here! Tell the locals. At the same time, there are social, cultural, economic and negative perceptions of Rhode Island.

Transportation: why only 2 zip cars on the East Side? Brown? Pick up and drop off elsewhere: CVB’s “zip Car” rentals pick up and return any CVB. Rent for 1-hour or by the day, etc. Public transportation: train station, bikes, rent a bike? Hybrid, taxi service. How do you get from Providence to beaches in a green way? Good enough bus schedule for both tourists and residents.

Lighthouses, villages, beaches, public access, more free space, forts, trails, kayaking, and the bird sanctuary in Middletown.

Educational/marketing...Instead of “Potato Heads” everywhere, why not eco/sustainability signs across the state?

State House – Green initiatives...need to streamline, coordinate, facilitate and organize tourism resource...do this from the ground up – TF green, highways, is there a presence of trash?

### **Nuggets**

- Residents as tourists (backyard tourism) – links to education...pride in local lifestyle community as an exchange.
- Guide to historical companies...mills, forts, mansions to experience a sense of history and restoration vs. new buildings. I want B&B’s and hotels that are eco-friendly.
- Local, good food...visit the URI Retreat Center – Agriculture...Food – what’s caught or collected. Cooking demonstrations...ethnic neighborhoods and local communities’ cuisine and everything...wines, vineyards, organic wine? Seafood, produce, local farms, Rhody fresh, salt/fresh water...Local/sustainable, organic?