

Help us Grow a Carbon Neutral Roanoke Region

April 1st, 2009 Posted in Roanoke CCLP by Mike Dame

We concluded our two-day Creative Communities Leadership Program seminar Tuesday with four fantastic initiatives — one each for the 4 T's of Technology, Talent, Tolerance and Territorial Assets — that will certainly challenge the Roanoke and New River Valley region's resolve to change.

And I'm excited to report that my idea was chosen as our Technology initiative.

The initiative is called "CNR 2030: Growing a carbon-neutral region." The ultimate goal: to achieve carbon neutrality as a region by 2030.

It's definitely what I'd call a BHAG — a Big Hairy Audacious Goal. I'm thankful that six "creative connectors" share my passion for this goal and comprise the CCLP team leading this initiative — Nicole Hall (who will co-chair with me), Jeremy Holmes, Nancy Maurelli, Bridget Meagher, Kevin Sullivan and Katie Wallace.

The challenges are enormous, to say the least. But imagine for a moment what this initiative can do to enhance Roanoke's profile and creative quotient!

We have a chance to become the nation's — and perhaps the world's — first and/or largest carbon-neutral community. Our plan is to partner with others in the region to engage, educate and employ the community toward the achievement of our goal. We will position the region as a proving ground for sustainable technologies. And as we progress toward our goal, the region will attract new businesses, generate new jobs and become a model community for sustainable living.

Among the potential benefits:

- * Climate neutrality would put us at the front of the pack among cities hoping to draw innovative, like-minded businesses and individuals.

- * Pursuit of the goal can help the region keep and attract talent in the creative class that wants to be part of such an exciting initiative.

- * The region may be able to secure federal funding for sustainability initiatives through new Obama administration programs.

Bear in mind that this is an initiative with a long horizon — 20 years. During the past two days, all we've done is establish a vision and a goal. The real work has yet to begin, and

Help us Grow a Carbon Neutral Roanoke Region

our first steps will be to identify regional partners (many of whom already have made or are making significant strides toward sustainable living) and form an advisory council to help guide our effort.

A year from now, we hope to see the initiative taking shape in the form of a Sustainable Living Center in downtown Roanoke and a series of educational programs. But as we begin our work, everyone on the team fully expects that the initiative will be defined and redefined multiple times. Our vision today may change tomorrow.

That is the nature of an audacious goal. Persistence will be required for the region to achieve it.

And even if we fail to fully realize carbon neutrality, the region will undoubtedly succeed.

As Alex Steffen wrote in his article “Creating Carbon-Neutral Cities”:

“An urban political and economic coalition bent on transforming its city into a climate neutral one could undertake a huge variety of actions. It could lobby for radical energy policy, government procurement, land use and transportation planning changes. It could create financing instruments for new development, retrofitting and industrial modernizations. It could mandate fundamental consumer changes and educate citizens to slash their personal carbon footprints. It could train a whole generation of working citizens who get green building, green manufacturing and clean energy. It could launch recruitment programs for sustainable designers, architects, engineers and technologists. It could make itself a hotbed for not only new thinking, but a new culture.”

I’ll write about the Roanoke CCLP’s other initiatives in future posts. All are extremely exciting and work together to help us build a “creative community.”

And as I stated when I was first selected as a “creative connector,” I am very grateful for the opportunity. I want to thank Stuart Mease and Lisa Soltis, the co-leaders of Roanoke CCLP, and Steven Pedigo of the Creative Class Group for his fantastic job as lead facilitator of our two-day seminar. We also were very fortunate to have as facilitators John Provo, associate director of Virginia Tech’s Office of Economic Development, and Jeanine Stewart, vice president for academic affairs at Hollins University.

If you are interested in joining our effort, please don’t hesitate to contact me via the email link listed to the right.