

Sustainability Spotlight:

Jen Jordan

City of Iowa City Recycling Coordinator



What does sustainability mean to you?

Sustainability to me is the triple bottom line: environment, local economy and social well-being. It means long-term thinking and planning ... and being willing to pay more financially up-front for a payback in all three areas. We've looked at mainly the economic aspect of projects for so long but I think we are coming into an era where we as the City are focusing more on the environmental and social needs of our residents through our activities, services and programs.



How is sustainability incorporated into your position?

I try to ensure that waste reduction and recycling programs are sustainable in that they pay for themselves (i.e., are not subsidized by landfill tipping fees), are accessible by all our residents and have the biggest environmental impact possible. The best example would be Rummage in the Ramp. We just completed our tenth year of that event. Over that time, Rummage in the Ramp has diverted almost 250 tons of usable stuff from the curbs of Iowa City and the landfill, and we've raised over \$150,000 for local non-profits who work at the event. Items are really affordable—most are priced under \$20, so this event really does hit all three areas of sustainability. Less new stuff needs to be extracted, made, and/or transported, local groups get funding, and we're saving local residents LOTS of money over new items. It's really a win-win-win!

What actions have you taken to improve sustainability within your position?

I've tried to help the community provide residents with more waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting opportunities. Through new partnerships, events, and new or improved programming, we've been able to reach more people to help them learn about the issue of waste. Apartment recycling is a good example. About 45% of Iowa City residents live in households that do not have access to curbside trash and yard waste pick-up or recycling services, so it's harder for them to recycle. Requiring landlords to provide recycling pick-up, just like they have to provide trash pick-up, gives 100% of residents access to recycling where they live. So again, this hits our triple bottom line: environment (more people recycling more materials), economy (saving the City expensive landfill space), and social well-being (equity in access to recycling).

In your opinion, what can be done to improve sustainability within our community?

We are moving in the right direction with a lot of components, but not fast enough! Most of what goes into the landfill could have been recycled or composted (27% is paper and cardboard, 25% is organic material that could be composted, 21% is plastic). We all -- individuals, workplaces, schools, churches -- must do a better job of reducing our volume of purchases, using what we already have, THEN recycling and composting. Overall, we need to buy less stuff to reduce the use of natural resources upstream and the effects of extraction, processing, transportation, disposal and the pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and waste from each of those steps. Waste is really about much more than burying stuff in a landfill.

For more information about the City of Iowa City's sustainability efforts, visit www.icgov.org/sustainability, subscribe to our Sustainable Iowa City newsletter at www.icgov.org/e-subscriptions, or follow #SustainableIC on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

