

Sustainability Spotlight:

Marcia Bollinger

City of Iowa City Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator and
Public Art Coordinator who also engages in Community Development



What does sustainability mean to you?

Originally I was confused on how broad a term “sustainability” seemed to be, but after working through some of the STAR certification process, I realized it has as much to do with community well-being and stability and access to art and cultural venues as it does to the natural and built environment. We can live in a community that has clean air, water, energy efficient facilities and homes but without social, educational, recreational and creative outlets, there would be little emotional investment in our community and it would be unlikely that we could attract and keep an engaged, creative and committed population.

How is sustainability incorporated into your position?

In my role as Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator, it has become clear how critical it is to have the participation of, and input by, the Iowa City residents in decision-making by our City Council and other boards and commissions. Reaching out to those in a neighborhood who will be directly impacted by a project to get their feedback, answer their questions and incorporate their ideas into projects not only helps the City staff do their job, but also makes it clear that we value our residents. Members of the community become stakeholders instead of onlookers, feeling they have no voice. Public Art, including visual and performance venues, has been proven to help attract and maintain a creative and engaged population. Participating in these art opportunities brings the community together at a social and creative level, further stabilizing the community. In other words – making Iowa City an exciting and dynamic place to live!

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

Establishing and maintaining ongoing communication with our residents via social media outlets such as Nextdoor, Facebook and Twitter have made access to information and awareness of opportunities to participate in the public process much easier over the past several years. Encouraging the public to connect with these outlets to receive this information as well as offer their input or get questions answered is a primary goal for my office that will encourage and sustain interaction between the public and the City of Iowa City. Working with neighborhoods to host events that will draw people together, allow them the opportunity to get to know each other and further help stabilize their neighborhood. The Public Art Program is reaching out to our creative community members and organizations to provide visual or performance opportunities through a matching grant program. Smaller art projects prioritize local artist participation – allowing them to showcase their work and the public to enjoy it.

In your opinion, what efforts can be made to improve sustainability within your position or within our community?

The STAR certification process showed us some areas that we could improve upon. Regular checkups on progress in these areas could provide some guidance in future planning processes. Seeking regular input from the public regarding general satisfaction with City services could assist, as well. Ongoing efforts to connect with underserved and disconnected populations such as low income, elderly and minority populations to provide feedback need to continue and grow.

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.

