

Mountain Green

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Is Sustainability an Impossible Dream?

by Robyn Griggs-Lawrence

We claim to live sustainably if we can harvest or extract the earth's resources without depleting or permanently damaging them. By that standard, no one in a country that devours coal, oil and water - and uses up a quarter of the earth's resources - can live sustainably. Our collective footprint is just too huge.

To live sustainably, we first need to be part of a greater, systemic transformation toward a culture that regards that as a worthy goal. According to green marketers, 10 percent of the U.S. population believes we will always have enough resources, so we're not going to engage them in the sustainability conversation. Twenty percent are very sincerely trying to minimize their massive American footprints, but their reducing and recycling efforts are futile if they can't convince the other 70 percent that sustainable living is a better way. Recent events, from the BP oil spill to the banking meltdown, have begun to tip the balance.

Unsustainable consumption has come to a screeching halt (no credit, no stuff), and Americans are nesting as they haven't in decades. "It's the end of the era of conspicuous displays of wealth," historian Steve Fraser told *The New York Times* in October 2008. "We are entering a new chapter in our history." For the first time in decades, Americans are building smaller homes and requesting green-built certification because they understand that

energy efficiency and durable, nontoxic materials will save them money over time. They're growing their own food, in backyards and as part of urban community gardens, passing up high fructose corn syrup and flavorless strawberries sprayed with pesticides by poorly paid workers 1,500 miles away. This new chapter has sustainability written into its DNA.

We celebrate small steps because they move the collective balance. "Change happens not by attacking what we do not find pleasing, but by living the example of what we ourselves believe," architect Sarah Susanka, who launched the small-is-better housing movement with her *Not So Big House* books, wrote in *Natural Home* magazine in 2002. Sarah's message that building smaller, better homes is both more sustainable and more satisfying was prophetic a decade ago and right on target today.

Change happens. Sustainable living in America is an attainable dream.

Robyn Griggs-Lawrence is editor-in-chief of Natural Home Magazine.



Mountain Green is a program of the Environmental Leadership Center of Warren Wilson College.

More information is available at www.mountaingreenwnc.org

Welcome to Warren Wilson College's 4th Annual Mountain Green Conference

by Margo Flood

We are excited to convene this gathering of builders, architects, health professionals, homeowners, community leaders, business owners and the many other concerned citizens interested in learning more about community sustainability.

In 2006, local attorney Bob Deutsch had growing concern about the considerable growth pressures upon the land and the communities of western North Carolina. He proposed a conference to discuss innovative practices and develop collaborative networks that would influence more responsible, sustainable growth. With a dedicated steering committee of regional leaders, Warren Wilson College's commitment to convene the conference, and leadership from the Environmental Leadership Center's Director of Community Outreach, Phillip Gibson, Deutsch convened the first conference in 2007. Now in its fourth year, *Mountain Green* continues to attract growing numbers of diverse citizens interested in building sustainable communities.

We are honored to host this year's speakers. Barry Patterson is a consultant grounded in principles of biomimicry, working at the integration point of sustainability+revitalization. Internationally renowned geriatrician Bill Thomas is revolutionizing eldercare. Vladimir Novotny, director of the Center for Urban Environmental Studies at Northeastern University, is a leader in community sustainability planning. Robyn Griggs Lawrence is editor-in-chief of the acclaimed *Natural Home* magazine and author of *The Wabi-Sabi House*. And Kathryn Lawler of the Atlanta Regional Commission and Scott Ball of the Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company architecture firm promote design principles that nurture multi-generational communities. We give special thanks to Griggs-Lawrence, Patterson, Lassiter, Novotny, Lawler and Ball for developing provocative pieces for our 4th Annual *Mountain Green* Newsletter.

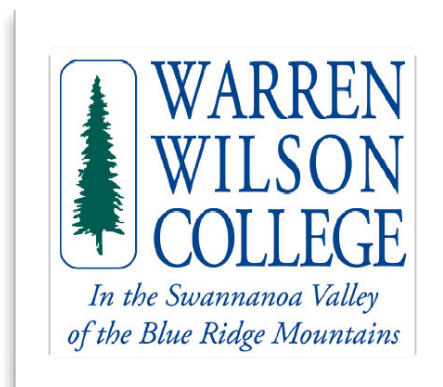
Conversations about community sustainability are always lively, often transformative, and ever present at Warren Wilson College. Our Triad of academics, work, and service immerses students in the study of human and ecological history, where they come to see that responsible global citizens must adopt a

more informed process of decision-making than ever before. Drawing upon this learning, they *participate* in solving chronic community issues through their community service. On campus, their work crew tasks earn the College national awards that distinguish us as a "living laboratory" of sustainability. From construction of our LEED-certified buildings including EcoDorm - the nation's only LEED-EB Platinum residence hall - to weatherization of the homes of people living below the poverty level, students champion and implement sustainable practices. They provide meat and vegetables from the farm and garden for the College's dining services, measure our emissions, and record the volume of our recycling. They come to learn that working together with common purpose, we *can* build sustainable community.

As evolving practitioners of our own sustainability ethos, and with great hope for the region's deeper embrace of these principles, we convene the 2010 *Mountain Green* conversation. We are convinced that these discussions about livable, sustainable community practices will deepen our regional commitment, build invaluable collaborations, and foster responsible practices.

Welcome to the conversation! The 4th Annual *Mountain Green* Conference promises to be a lively, essential dialogue, much as the pieces that follow.

Margo Flood is the executive director of Warren Wilson College's Environmental Leadership Center and the College's chief sustainability official.



Sustainability - A Path to Your Authentic Life

by Barry Patterson and Andy Lassiter

By definition, sustainability means - literally - to sustain or endure. To ecologists, the word describes how natural systems remain diverse and productive over time. To humans, sustainability refers to the capacity to maintain the planet, i.e. using no more than we need to stay alive while leaving enough for future generations. Undoubtedly, the notion of sustainability has been blurred by its various contexts and associations with renewable energy, new technology, business models, agriculture systems, infrastructure development, and the simplicity of terms like “going green.”

Despite the wide range of definitions, the concept of sustainability boils down to treading lightly on the earth... leaving things better than you found them or, at least no worse. Consider the original Iroquois concept of seven generation sustainability: thinking seven generations ahead, taking into account any impact a decision or action could have on the earth or the welfare and wellbeing of future generations.

The concept of sustainability is hard to truly embrace because of the interconnected nature of humans and the earth. Literally everything is interdependent in the infinitely complex and diverse web of life on our planet. Humans are a part of nature. We share our basic needs - oxygen, food, sunlight, water, energy - with animals, plants, and almost all other life forms on the planet. We are completely intertwined with the natural process. John Muir's quote, “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe” is more than just a poetic notion.

On a day-to-day basis, many of us go through life living in a “concrete jungle,” consuming resources, eating processed foods grown with chemicals, and never

truly connecting with nature. A return to the use of natural resources within sustainable limits will require the collective effort of individuals, organizations, and countries. As humans come together to map this uncharted course, we find that sustainability is a journey. No one knows how to do it. No one knows how to get there.

In the past few years, thanks to common sense and scientific evidence, the overall concept of sustainability has begun to take hold. Businesses are learning that to compete they must be sustainable. Everyone from General Electric to Wal-Mart is on the bandwagon. A look at the present state of the planet shows that “seeking to be sustainable” is simply not enough. When we really examine sustainability and investigate what we're attempting to sustain, it appears that all natural life-supporting systems are on the decline. Not to be discouraged, we are finding that the sustainability journey can awaken us to an entirely new adventure.

Sustainability provides us with stepping stones to more dynamic ways of thinking, the catalyst to the “Four R's of Sustainability:” Restoration, Regeneration, Revitalization, and Renewal. Unlike many “de” words in society (demolition, destruction, devastation, depletion, etc.), the “Four R's” embrace the possibility of a bright and productive future.

Beginning in the 1980's, the catch phrase was “Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle.” That model provided a good start, but that closed system simply led to more linear thought. When you think in the context of real life sustainability, when you make it personal, do you want a “sustainable relationship” or a “revitalized and reenergized” relationship? The latter presents a much more dynamic and full circle approach to solving the problems at hand, not to mention making the approach itself more inspiring.

Living an authentic life is something almost everyone aspires to, and achieving that goal can lead to a happy and healthy present and future. First, examine your intrinsic self, your personal attitudes, core

values, self-development goals, interests, and passions - those areas of your personality that make you feel truly and uniquely like YOU.

Next, understand your extrinsic self-how and why you use your talents and strengths, to make a living. What brings you enjoyment? How loving and accepting are you of others? What are the professional skills you are applying? What you do reflects who you are.

Then take a broader look at your life - family, close relationships, and your work and working environment, the culture, social systems, and institutions of which you are a part. Do those people and organizations have similar core values? How about your religious or spiritual community? Is your community livable and inclusive, and does it offer both variety and depth?

The bottom line is each of us is just one person, but we are collectively a family that can work together. Our personal lives, our homes, our societies, and our world can be restored, regenerated, revitalized, and renewed (the Four R's) when we do it together.

There are many stories of people living out their authenticity in support of humanity and the planet. Jason McClellon awakened to his authentic niche. Jason is an international thought leader in the green architecture movement and co-creator of Pharos, the most advanced building material rating system in North America. His most recent accomplishment is creating the Living Building Challenge: a global call to all builders, contractors, governments, and humans to create a sustainable future by reconciling the built environment with the natural environment.

The catalyst that awakened Jason to his authenticity was a nickel-mining operation that devastated much of his hometown of Sudbury, Ontario. In high school he worked with community projects to plant grass and trees, an attempt to revive the soil and the damaged environment. This passion led Jason to his future career path and subsequent success

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Cities of the Future

by Vladimir Novotny, PhD

This is an excerpt from an article which may be read online at the Mountain Green website: www.mountaingreenwnc.org

Cities and villages across the globe are confronting growing challenges of supplying safe, clean water and sanitation services to residents and industry and protecting urban ecology. Urban populations are expanding, climate change is beginning to create more erratic patterns of droughts and storms threatening coastal areas with more flooding, and per capita consumption and use of resources is on the rise. It has been realized by the scientific community, policy makers, and now by public that the current wasteful urban metabolism, including water/stormwater/wastewater management is not sustainable, overuses resources, requires a lot of energy, and emits excessive amounts of greenhouse gases (GHG). There is a need to implement water conservation and change the current system of water management and the entire urban metabolism to a system that would, not only save water and energy and save the water bodies from pollution, but also be attractive to developers and city planners and desired by the public.

This new paradigm of urbanization is based on the premise that urban waters are the lifeline of cities and the focus of the movement towards more sustainable cities.

Cities of the Future (COTF) evolution is ranging from the microscale “green” buildings, subdivisions, or “ecoblock” to macroscale ecocities and ecologically reengineered urban watersheds, incorporating also transportation and neighborhood urban living. The new paradigm must include consideration of energy and green house gas emission reductions and treat stormwater and reclaimed used water as a resource to be reused rather than wasted and requiring costly disposal that can

further damage the environment. Therefore, the COTFs will combine concepts of “smartgreen” developments and the landscape with natural systems and controls of pollution and stormwater flows from the landscape. They will reuse highly treated effluents and urban stormwater for various purposes including landscape and agricultural irrigation, groundwater recharge to enhance groundwater resources and minimizing subsidence of historic infrastructure; environmental flow enhancement of effluent dominated and flow deprived streams; and nonpotable water supply. The organic content and energy in used water will be treated as a recoverable resource along with reclamation and reuse of urban stormwater.

The drive to develop sustainable cities (COTF) has emerged because of the realization of anticipated consequences of business as usual progression of cities under the major stresses of (1) population increases and migration, (2) threats of adverse impacts of global climatic changes, and (3) increasing water shortages in many highly populated regions of the world. There is now an almost uniform agreement among professionals in many disciplines that the current infrastructure and urban planning paradigm that relies on fast surface underground conveyance of water and wastewater, regional water and wastewater management systems, energy overuse and use of other resource in the cities, have become impediments to achieving sustainable urban development and living, and addressing the impacts of global climatic change.

Sustainability of the cities, pollution, and social qualities and other attributes and amenities are related to “urban metabolism.” Cities and their interconnected surroundings are complex systems consisting of nonliving infrastructure, machinery, roads and ecosystems with living organisms. Humans are a part of the ecosystem. The urban system receives inputs which are accumulated and growing, cycled,

attenuated and transformed within the system and produces outputs. The urban metabolism can be defined as the “sum of the technical and socio-economic processes that occur within the cities, resulting in growth, production of energy, and elimination of waste. The balance or imbalance between the inputs, accumulation and growth, and waste resulting in missions of undesirable pollutants determine the sustainability or unsustainability of the city.

Dr. Novotny is Professor, Director, Center for Urban Environmental Studies at Northeastern University’s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

How Green is Mountain Green?

Being “green” requires transparency and accountability. The conference organizers are utilizing the purchasing principles of Warren Wilson College to make this event as green as possible and are also asking sponsors and vendors to adhere to these principles while participating in this conference.

This means that the content and intent of the products and/or services of the company promote sustainable, health-sensitive principles.

Authentic Life

by Barry Patterson
continued

as CEO of a leading national sustainable building organization and one of the most influential individuals in the green building movement.

Eve Blossom's company, Lulan Artisans, is a unique for-profit social venture that is a creative collaboration between American textile designers and gifted Asian artisans. Originally an architect, Eve became disillusioned with her career, and traveled to Asia to find new meaning in her life's work. After witnessing human trafficking and repressed societies, Eve had an explosive wake-up call that completely changed her path.

Now, twelve years later, Eve's company has built a network of over 650 weavers, spinners, dyers, and finishers in various weaving centers and cooperatives in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and India. She is empowering local women through social enterprise. Artisans are paid fairly for their skills and respected for their work. By extending benefits into the community through education and housing projects, Eve is creating sustainable livelihoods and improving the quality of life in communities throughout Southeast Asia.

Another example of finding an authentic niche is Dr. John Todd and his wife Nancy Jack Todd. In 1989, Dr. Todd, an internationally recognized inventor and pioneer in the construction of wastewater treatment systems, decided to find a cost-effective, sustainable solution to the growing global water crisis. Having a background in biological sciences, the Todd's wondered if ecological concepts, specifically self-perpetuating food chains, could serve people's need for clean water.

The result was the Eco-Machine™, an efficient and refined wastewater treatment system that is capable of achieving high quality water without the need for hazardous chemicals. The system consists of multiple treatment zones that mimic natural ecosystems, including microscopic algae, bacteria, and

zooplankton, upward to snails, clams, and fish, as well as higher species like shrubs and trees that are actually grown within the system. By following his calling to help society, Jack is the pioneer of sustainable wastewater treatment and constructs systems all over the world that use no chemicals and virtually eliminate environmental impacts.

These individuals began and moved along their journey of both sustainability and self-discovery. On their journeys toward sustainable thinking, they found their own authentic niches. Their projects are truly life affirming and arose from their personal passions.

You and I want to live authentically. But authenticity sounds like a nebulous concept, something we cannot measure. There is also the wish that it happens quickly, when in reality it may be a three or five or ten-year journey. Regardless of the time it takes, I challenge you to find your authentic life-affirming niche and measure it by what you do with your life. It may be your existing job, a new career, or a creative idea. Your niche could be a hobby, pastime, or a passion that affirms your true nature. Pursue your niche! And awaken to your true calling in life and, in turn, create honest, meaningful success that impacts your own life and that of others.

Each of us is unique and has incredible gifts to offer the world. Uncovering them and figuring out how to best use them is the challenge. Recognize your strengths and talents and let them form your personal mission to do what you love. It may be your work, your leisure, your life as a stay-at-home parent, or an adventurous homesteader. A brilliant mind may be one of your gifts. But authenticity doesn't reside in your mind; it's found in your heart.

The broad concept of sustainability is the perfect metaphor for establishing and affirming your individual life-affirming niche. By being mindful of natural biological processes, you will find ways to

sustain the environment and also your niche in life. The interconnected nature of human civilization and the natural environment require that we embrace sustainability. Incorporating the concept of sustainability will not only help you create a successful business or community, but also guide you along the path toward tangible success and authentic happiness in your life. Your individual work may be measured by your positive impact on future generations, or measured by your own reflection. May you find and live your authentic life-affirming niche in the spirit of seven generation sustainability.

Barry Patterson is a consultant grounded in principles of biomimicry, working at the integration point of sustainability+revitalization. Andy Lassiter is associate with the firm of Barry Patterson.

Monthly Speaker Series

2010 - 2011 Schedule Includes

Anita R. Brown-Graham

director of the North Carolina State University Institute for Emerging Issues
(invited)

Lester Brown

founder and president of Earth Policy Institute. He also founded Worldwatch Institute

Bill McKibben

In 2010 the Boston Globe called him "probably the nation's leading environmentalist" and Time magazine described him as "the world's best green journalist."

www.mountaingreenwnc.org

2010 Mountain Green Conference Agenda

8:00 AM Vendor Area	Registration The conference will begin with an opportunity to eat local food, drink fair trade organic coffee and network with conference participants while visiting vendors.
8:30 AM Kittredge Theater	Welcome Sandy Pfeiffer, PhD, President, Warren Wilson College Robert J. Deutsch, P.A., Chairman, Mountain Green Steering Committee
9:00 AM Plenary Sessions Kittredge Theater	Sustainability as a stepping stone to community revitalization: How to awaken and engage your community's authentic life-affirming niche Barry Patterson is a consultant grounded in principles of biomimicry, working at the integration point of sustainability+revitalization. Aging in place & the Greenhouse Dr. Bill Thomas, MD, is an internationally renowned geriatrician revolutionizing eldercare.
Noon Vendor Tent Area	Lunch features locally produced food provided by Sodexo Dining Services. Dr. Bill Thomas will be available in the Jensen Lecture for an informal discussion. Seating is limited to 70. Please get your lunch and join us.
1:30 PM Location to be announced	Robyn Griggs Lawrence Lawrence is chief editor of <i>Natural Home Magazine</i> . Called “one of the best-informed advocates of natural living in America” by the Conservation Research Institute, Lawrence wants homeowners to know they “don’t need to spend a fortune to make their homes more environmentally sound. The idea is to slowly get more conscious and make better choices over time.”
1:30 PM Location to be announced	Kathryn Lawler & Scott Ball Lawler, of the Atlanta Regional Commission and Ball of the architect firm Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company will present information pertaining to their work integrating the priority of “aging in place” into regional master planning for real places.
1:30 PM Location to be announced	Vladimir Novotny, PhD Novotny is Professor, Director, Center for Urban Environmental Studies at Northeastern University’s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. He will speak on the fifth paradigm and other principles presented in his book released in 2007 titled <i>Cities of the Future: Towards integrated sustainable water and landscape management</i> .
1:30 PM Meet at Orr Cottage	Stan Cross Cross is Education Director for the Environmental Leadership Center of Warren Wilson College. He will lead participants on an instructional walking tour that introduces them to the best practices for green buildings, waste management, landscaping, stormwater, land use, and agriculture found on the campus of Warren Wilson College.
3:30 PM Kittredge Theater	Community SPEAK OUT! Continuing education and professional development hours require that you sign the forms available at the information tent in the vendor area.
5:00 to 6:30 PM Vendor Area	Business Expo & Reception - Local food & local beer will be provided

Creating Lifelong Communities: A Sustainable Response to the Opportunity of Longevity

by Kathryn Lawler and Scott Ball

Getting to grow older is the great gift of the 20th century - a gift most Americans are still figuring out how to enjoy. In 1900, life expectancy at birth was only 47.3 years. Through a series of public health advancements, social policies, and programs, U.S. life expectancy is now in the late 70s for men and early 80s for women. More than just an interesting statistic, this dramatic change, occurring over a relatively short period of time, creates challenges and opportunities in all aspects of society. For the most part, our country's health care and social service systems, housing and transportation infrastructure are not positioned to meet new needs, jeopardizing their long term sustainability.

That's not to say we've done nothing. Our nation has responded in several major ways to the relatively new experience of getting to grow old. In 1935, the Social Security Act provided Old Age Assistance and Old Age Survivors Insurance, lifting a significant percentage of older adults out of poverty. In 1965, the Older Americans Act was signed into law by President Johnson. At the same time Medicare and Medicaid were established under the Social Security Act of 1965. All three programs, the Older Americans Act, Medicare and Medicaid have evolved to become a significant source of support for older adults and their families. States and local communities target policies, programs and millions of dollars at the needs of the "new" older adult population.

Despite these substantial efforts and resources, most Americans are not prepared to grow older. For all too many old age is defined by lost independence and control. The dominant perception is that older people live in nursing homes and nursing homes are dreadful places to be

avoided at all costs. In addition to how individuals and families feel about growing older, existing systems and supports are not prepared to withstand the pressures and demands of the baby boom population. Medicare's Trust Fund will start to run a deficit in 2019. Medicaid is already consuming an increasing share of all 50 states' budgets, a tremendous difficulty in the current economic downturn. Funding for the Older Americans Act has been held virtually flat for the past decade and many of the programs are out of sync with future consumer demands (AARP 2005). Even if these programs did not face a funding crisis, they would not and could not be an adequate response to the opportunity of longevity. Too often, they meet critical needs, but do so by shunting people into separate and distinct silos that treat conditions. They spend money identifying needs and prescribing solutions without regard for the way people live and the important role that place, relationships, history and connectedness play in determining quality of life, especially the life lived to age 95, 98 or 100.

In the 1999 *Olmstead v L.C.* case, the Supreme Court ruled that unjustified institutional isolation of a person is a form of discrimination because it "perpetuates unwarranted assumptions that persons so isolated are incapable or unworthy of participating in community life." The court added that "confinement in an institution severely diminishes the everyday life activities of individuals, including family relations, social contacts, work options, economic independence, educational advancement, and cultural enrichment." This ruling began to shift some federal and state resources away from institutional care and toward community based supports. It also provided fuel to a growing interest in the role that place and community play in either facilitating or erecting barriers to successful aging.

The emerging research and programs (called by many names including elder-friendly communities, aging in place, aging

in community, naturally occurring retirement communities, and livable communities) are based on the premise that it is not possible to meet the needs of the growing older adult population with supportive programs or innovations in healthcare alone (Ball 2004). As the Supreme Court determined in the *Olmstead* ruling, the places where people live can largely determine whether or not it is possible to live an independent, active and engaged life. The barriers erected by poor community design, can diminish the everyday activities of individuals in the same way that the Court found that institutions could unfairly and unconstitutionally isolate individuals because of their age or capacity.

These are not small barriers. The pervasive American development pattern of the last 60 years does not create places where people of all ages and abilities can live, work, and play. Sprawling auto-dependent suburban neighborhoods with no walkable access to a drugstore, grocery store, post office or even a coffee shop are simply unlivable places for anyone who cannot drive or might permanently or temporarily need one level living. The result—individuals and couples are forced to leave their homes and communities, the places they've helped build and shape over decades. Communities that do not address the inevitable facts of aging are by definition unsustainable communities that have to be regularly and completely changed out. They absorb high amounts of physical resources in buildings and infrastructure that have to be specially built for an aging population. They waste countless financial resources, both individual and public, as each family has to mount their own war against the environment that no longer meets their needs.

Lifelong communities—places planned, designed and programmed to meet the needs of dynamic bodies and minds are less resource intensive than those which only support a static segment of the lifecycle. Buildings, homes and infrastructure that flex with changes in

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Creating Lifelong Communities

continued

need and lifestyle can be used and re-used. Intergenerational communities that do not segregate by age can absorb changes in demographics and population structure. Mixed use neighborhoods with accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians facilitate mobility as transportation needs and preferences change, requiring fewer specialized and expensive services.

The nation finds itself with a very certain demographic future, but almost no clear way of how to meet it. The baby boom of the 1940s, 50s and 60s has begun to hit old age. The first boomer applied for Social Security in January 2008. Technological and medical advances continue to increase the likelihood that many will live well into their 90s and celebrate their 100th birthday.

The only viable way to accept the gift and meet the challenge of longevity is to match the dramatic transformation of the 20th century that made it possible to grow old with an equally dramatic and fundamentally new way of being old. In the same tradition as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the Older Americans Act,

any new effort cannot be small minded or small in scope. Rather than simply focusing on new funding or changes in regulations, the next significant response to the growing older adult population must look at ALL funding. We must reconsider the way roads are designed, sidewalks are poured, houses are constructed, stores and clinics are located, parks are planned and the way opportunities for recreation and entertainment are programmed. Cholesterol scores, blood pressure and glucose levels are often measured, but the true determinants of successful aging must also assess addresses, zip codes, zoning codes, and transportation policy.

Kathryn Lawler, MPP, is the Director of External Affairs for the Atlanta Regional Commission. Scott Ball, MArch is a Senior Planner and Designer with the international architecture firm, Duany, Plater-Zyberk

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