

## **City Council Action Item Cover Sheet**

DATE: November 7, 2018

### **Agenda Item:**

EPA Sustainability Application

### **Question Before Council:**

Does the Council wish to participate in the EPA Sustainability Application

### **Person/Group Initiating Request:**

EPA

### **Item Summary/Background:**

Based upon the presentation Council received on October 10, does the Council wish to actively participate in the EPA Sustainability Application Development?



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# science in ACTION

INNOVATIVE RESEARCH FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

## SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS FOR SMALL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES: CONCEPT TESTING A NEW APPLICATION

### Background

Small towns and rural communities are looking for ways to strengthen their economies, provide better quality of life, and build on local assets. They are creating their own paths to sustainability that enhance their distinctive characteristics and that fit their size, geography, and resources. In a series of discussions with smaller communities (<50,000 residents), EPA has heard that community leaders want a simple dashboard or compact set of tools that can help them assess and improve their sustainability profile.

### Sustainability Snapshot Project

In response to this need, EPA's Pacific Northwest Regional Office (Region 10) and Office of Research and Development are collaborating with the Washington State Association of Communities and interested communities on a **Sustainability Snapshot Project**. The project is tailoring existing nationally-available indicators that use publicly-available data to match the unique needs of small communities. The emerging dashboard application is called "**Decision Integration for Strong Communities**" or DISC. It is designed to encourage smart growth and offer relevant, local, and readily-available information. For a community with fewer economic or staffing resources, the sustainability snapshot and toolkits that DISC provide may help communities know where to start, build consensus on improvement goals and projects, and measure changes in the community's sustainability profile over time.

### Community Engagement

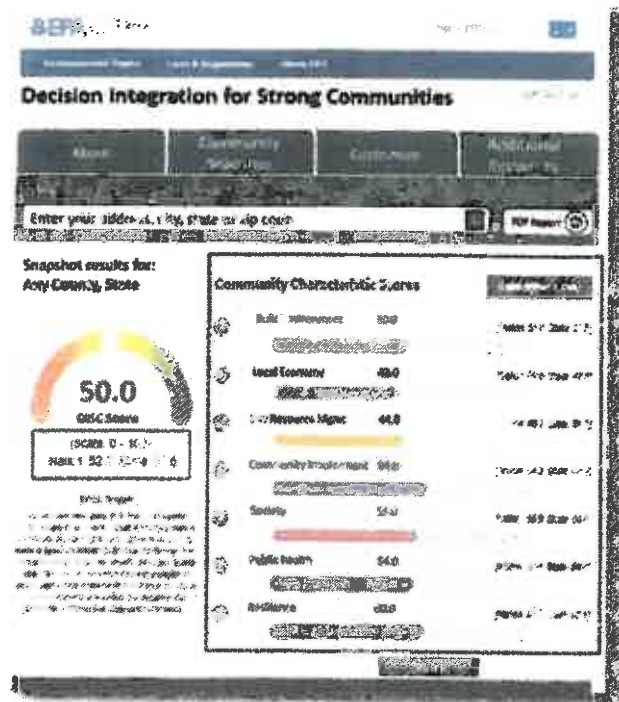
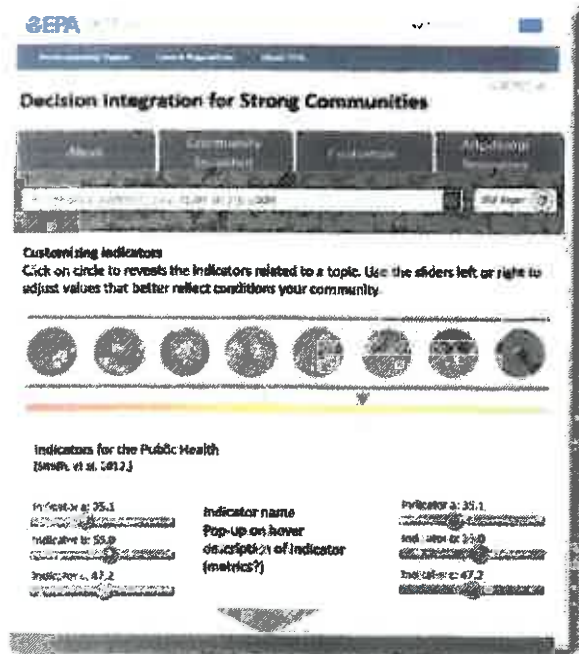
To ensure DISC is useful to a variety of smaller and rural communities, EPA staff will consult interested communities and potential users at different steps of the development process. For example, community planners from five or six small Oregon and Washington communities will cooperate in testing a DISC prototype. If the usability of the prototype proves successful, EPA may further develop DISC and make it available as an executable, downloadable file for beta testing.

### Use of Existing Indicators

All of the scientific content available through DISC will be curated from existing environmental indicators (nationally consistent measurements) for various topics such as the built environment, community involvement, education, natural resource management, equity, hazard vulnerability, housing, local economy, public health, resilience planning, society and transportation. These indicators are derived from a broad collection of socio-economic, health and ecological data collected from publicly available sources. Continuing discussions with community participants will help Agency researchers identify key topic areas, and incorporate the indicators into applications and tools that are useful and accessible for smaller communities. The topic areas will be used as the basis for populating a community characteristics dashboard, a user-friendly graphic interface display that presents information in an accessible, easily understood format.

## DISC Prototype

DISC is an application of existing indicators that offers relevant, local and readily-available information to help smaller communities advance their sustainability goals. The figure to the right illustrates how the tool may represent an overall community sustainability score, and its component scores for community characteristics relating to the topic areas of interest. Upon initial use, communities will be provided with information on sustainability attributes such as environment, natural resource management, transportation, and most importantly, information on resources they can potentially target to implement projects to improve the community's resilience and long-term success. Users can score or



weight the indicators to reflect their community's constraints and priorities (figure to the left), creating a highly customized snapshot of local conditions and sustainability factors. They can also save their snapshot as a downloadable, easy-to-share pdf file. The DISC application may also be used to track and monitor the benefits and impacts of local sustainability projects. The application is being designed to be flexible and readily upgradeable, making it applicable for exploring current conditions with the confidence that it will be available to future assessments, and comparing and contrasting growth and change in the future.

## CONTACTS

For more information, or to partner with EPA in the development of DISC, please contact:

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