

# Nichols Hills

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NEWS

## CURVE APPEAL

*Retail Triumph at Balliets*

**INSPIRATION IS SERVED**

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Kitchen Tour*

**HERE AND BACK AGAIN**

*Cityscapes From Broadway to Bricktown*

*Going Retro at Kyle's 1025*

# GRASSROOTS TO MASSROOTS



ERICK GFEILLER

By Mary Ellen Ternes



Sustainability can benefit from both a top-down as well as a bottom-up approach. Corporations tend to utilize a top-down approach due to their pyramid organizational structure. However, with all of our individual views and personal levels of participation, communities can really benefit from the bottom-up approach, such that our collective sustainability planning can be a real grassroots endeavor – productive and challenging.

We are all so different! Some of us count gallons of water used, purchase only reusable containers and actually use our reusable shopping bags when we shop for groceries. Others are pleased if we can combine trips in the car and recycle our aluminum cans. We all have different goals, different tolerances, different levels of flexibility and chaos in our lives. Sustainability planning necessarily reaches into our personal experiences, and requires that we tap into our personal resources of growth and tolerance in our collaborative efforts.

It takes brave, fearless leaders to tread into the collaborative world of sustainability planning. One such remarkable group is the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG). ACOG is a voluntary association of city, town and county governments within the central Oklahoma area, including Oklahoma, Cleveland, Canadian and Logan Counties.

Since June of 1966, ACOG has set about providing aid to local governments in planning for common need, cooperating for mutual benefit and coordinating for sound regional development. It's a regional cooperative of, by and for local governments that bolsters the strength of member governments, individually and collectively.

Among the projects ACOG undertakes on behalf of, and in coordination with, local communities are transportation planning, metropolitan planning and its highly visible "Clean Cities Program." ACOG is working on long-range transportation planning issues like air quality, traffic congestion and "intelligent transportation system technologies." With its Clean Cities program, ACOG is helping to facilitate use of alternative fuel vehicles (AFVs for those in the know) and manage the Clean Air Alert Day (you've seen the "Ozone Alert"). ACOG also operates the Air Quality Public Education program, helps local governments with water conservation and will soon be implementing a stormwater prevention program.

This kind of coordination among so many member municipalities is really very cool. Also, ACOG's structure, function and level of partner participation make it the perfect mechanism for coordinating regional sustainability efforts. And regional sustainability planning is ACOG's latest project!

In the 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act, Congress provided a total of \$150 million to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for a Sustainable Communities Initiative. The idea is to improve regional planning efforts by integrating housing and transportation decisions to better incorporate livability, sustainability and social equity values into land use plans and zoning. In other words, the money would help us make sure that our plans for new hous

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ing and transportation consider, for example, having transportation located close to affordable housing, promoting our access to jobs, education and services and business access to markets, revitalizing our downtowns and protecting our rural landscapes, stopping waste and helping us be more efficient and accountable overall. About \$100 million can be used for regional sustainability planning efforts to integrate housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation and infrastructure.

But how do we get some of that \$100 million, you might ask? Well, ACOG is writing a grant application, of course! ACOG's regional sustainability planning will mean that citizens from ACOG member cities such as Luther, Jones, Nichols Hills, Oklahoma City, Moore, Slaughterville and Newcastle will leave their comfortable city "bubble" to meet and greet citizens from other municipalities to collaborate in developing sustainable plans to benefit us all.

To kick things off, on July 19 ACOG hosted a Sustainable Communities Workshop on the Chesapeake Energy campus. At this meeting, ACOG asked everyone for their vision of a future central Oklahoma region, focusing on potential futures including more transportation choices, more equitable, affordable housing, a better and stronger economy, healthy, safe and walkable communities and neighborhoods and a thriving local food system.

Says ACOG Executive Director John G. Johnson, "We are conscious of the connections between housing, land-use, economic and workforce development and transportation through our planning work. A sustainable communities regional plan would address these issues, and improve our livability in central Oklahoma."

ACOG's work on these planning efforts folds perfectly into the ongoing efforts of the Oklahoma Sustainability Network and our municipal sustainability commissions. In fact, Nicolle Franklin, current OSN Secretary and a local consultant, is assisting ACOG with the public outreach and preparation of the grant application. "We have been so pleased with the breadth and depth of interest and involvement from so many different organizations within the region," she said. "Our hope is that ACOG will continue to facilitate discussions and sharing between these groups whether or not our region is awarded a grant. Each of the involved organizations is doing important work on their own,

but it's amazing to see what can happen when they are able to collaborate and lift up each other's efforts."

Mary Y. Frates, outgoing Chairman of the City of Nichols Hills Environment, Health and Sustainability Commission, worked with a committed group of citizen commissioners and forward-thinking City Council and captured synergies from a new chapter of the Oklahoma Sustainability Network called "Planet Nichols Hills" to coordinate sustainability efforts with ACOG as well. The City of Nichols Hills was even awarded ACOG's Innovation Award for creating a body committed to educating and involving citizens and developing a community sustainability plan. Referring to ACOG's latest project, Mary says, "Regional sustainability planning is an ambitious and challenging goal and I applaud ACOG for applying to HUD for a grant that would bring communities in central Oklahoma together to plan for the future." To Mary's delight, the City of Nichols Hills City Council recently passed a resolution supporting ACOG's grant application.

Of course, the City of Nichols Hills is just one example of successful grassroots sustainability initiatives in central Oklahoma, which include the sophisticated Norman Sustainability Network and also Sustainable Edmond, among others. We might consider another term, though, given that grass is a monoculture, and by definition, not really all that sustainable. How about "mass roots?" Mass roots of the sustainable masses. ■

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*Mary Ellen Ternes, Esq. is a former chemical engineer from both the EPA and industry. She is currently a shareholder with McAfee & Taft and co-chair with Richard A. Riggs, Esq. of its Renewable and Sustainable Energy Group, and is serving a three-year term as City of Nichols Hills Environment, Health and Sustainability Commissioner.*



### BE INFORMED

To learn about the remarkable ACOG, see: [www.acogok.org](http://www.acogok.org)

To read about new funding for sustainability planning, see: [portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program\\_offices/sustainable\\_housing\\_communities](http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities)

[portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program\\_offices/sustainable\\_housing\\_communities/Sustainable%20Communities%20Regional%20Planning%20Grants](http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities/Sustainable%20Communities%20Regional%20Planning%20Grants)

To understand the fundamental principles underlying regional sustainability planning efforts, see: [fastlane.dot.gov/2009/06/livability-principles-will-guide-federal-housing-environmental-and-transportation-policy.html](http://fastlane.dot.gov/2009/06/livability-principles-will-guide-federal-housing-environmental-and-transportation-policy.html)