

Notes from Aspen Climate Action Conference Session: Gaining Traction Through Community Partnerships; Facilitators/Speakers: Debra Sachs and Jonathan Kevles Friday, October 13.

These notes came from a discussion inspired by the following question – “The Conundrum”: *If investments in energy efficiency and certain renewable energy options bring so many tangible benefits to homeowners, business owners, and to a local economy, then why aren't such investments more prevalent?*

The notes are examples of why The Conundrum exists, and some ideas for how to overcome The Conundrum

Problem/Obstacles

- Cities lack the upfront capital to spend on EE programs; can't afford to take on debt
- Lack of familiarity – how to convince leaders/community to step out. Often wrong approach leads to politicization
- Lots of emotion around the issue
- Lack of clarity on benefits to local community
- Not matching the right message with the right audience – “stakeholder analysis” is critical
- In a local economy, throughput often viewed as the ultimate goal, but “net” is better measure of success; quality of growth and wealth accumulation in a community vs. amount of economic activity
- Renewable energy more “Sexy” than EE.
- People want the light on, but they can't decipher their utility bill. How can behavior be changed w/out adequate information to which to respond? Need utility billing/use data to be more transparent, such as “smart metering.” Can a culture (of natural resource use) be changed without fear or pain or a utopian vision?
- Ideas are not tied to “turnkey” solutions, and the need for behavior change incentives to be incorporated into those solutions
- Need to learn how to “language” the message appropriately (for different stakeholders)
- Lack of leadership – projects need a vision and a project champion
- Utilities – misalignment of incentives
- Conservatism of banks and hesitancy to deal with [EE] investment/loan opportunities and the unknown risks therein
- Lack of information on programs and how they function
- Denial of problem, “don't want to see the [climate] problem; people don't want a disruption in their current quality of life
- How can we embrace (and get others to embrace) the truth?

- Fiscal investment not in the structure of city government – budgets are often short-term in view (example: EE investments might need five years to bring the needed financial return, yet public safety services are needed today and can be felt today)
- There is often a lack of confidence in the numbers (payback, lifecycle costs) both with city departments and private businesses
- How do you get the full message out there without showing the consequences – w/out the [often paralysis-inducing] Fear?
- Electric rate structures work against EE investments

Suggestions Moving Forward

- Job creation the “bread and butter” of local politics – use this argument to elected officials
- ESCO – will analyze energy use, calculate savings, and will front the dollars for investment; can mean Zero risk to the ESCO customer
- Identify a project champion, establish a vision
- Connect message with saving time, saving money, improving health
- Recognize the power of one
- If no public utility, make friends and promote EE and renewable energy businesses
- Anticipate changes in leadership
- Connect multiple strategies
- Expect delays and some defeats
- Make message simple and easy, pointed to each specific audience
- The role of “communicators” is critical in helping all stakeholders understand the benefits of EE, acknowledgement of the risks and how those risks can be mitigated, or how risk perceptions can be reduced
- Need to emphasize what’s right and what’s wrong – look at who’s producing the energy
- Are there legislative and/or regulatory barriers beyond the control of local government that inhibit going further with locally initiated EE programs?
 - Not much on the federal level
 - State building codes are a big issue!!
- Can measures be implemented to increase consumer awareness to counteract legislative/regulatory barriers? (example: France now requires that new homes show expected energy use/costs)
 - Problem of a capitalist society vs. a socialist society (EU)
- Need to align different environmental groups on EE and climate change
- Green lending – a new but promising approach in the financial community