

SUSTAINABILITY HEROES

July 2019



Sustainable Jersey Celebrates a Decade of Impact

To celebrate Sustainable Jersey's tenth anniversary, we are spotlighting the people, organizations, businesses and agencies that have been a part of our evolution. The [New Jersey League of Municipalities](#) is a founding partner of the Sustainable Jersey program and continues to support and guide the program today. The League represents all of New Jersey's 565 municipalities and over 13,000 elected and appointed municipal officials. In this role, the League has been a champion for Sustainable Jersey and for the sustainability efforts of their member communities for over ten years.

When the first group of sustainably-minded mayors started pushing for more action and support for their efforts, the League formed the Mayors Committee for a Green Future. That committee eventually became the Sustainable Jersey Board of Trustees. In 2009, the NJLM Educational Foundation solicited and received the first grant that enabled the launch of the Sustainable Jersey Grants Program.

The League understood the value of the program and contributed know-how and clout to provide Sustainable Jersey legitimacy. Sustainable Jersey's success is also due to the early dedication and efforts of a score of mayors who tirelessly made presentations at council meetings throughout New Jersey promoting this new idea.

To this day, the League continues to be a champion for Sustainable Jersey and for the efforts of municipal leaders to make progress on sustainability. Mayors, municipal officials and local leaders are the heart and soul of Sustainable Jersey. Our partnership with the League is the embodiment of that. Sustainable Jersey values the expertise and dedication of all of our partners at the League.



The League's Mayors Committee for a Green Future

In 2006, Mayor Fred Profeta of Maplewood and Mayor Meryl Frank of Highland Park were actively leading sustainability efforts in their towns. To expand the movement state-wide, the two mayors enlisted the help of William G. Dressel, Jr. the former executive director of the League. The three agreed that meaningful environmental change at the local level needed the leadership of a hard-working group of mayors. The League established the Mayors Committee for a Green Future to be their official body that acted on behalf of the League in support of the Sustainable Jersey program. The committee included the following municipal representatives: Andrew Carten (City of Trenton), Joseph Clark (Ocean City), Louise Davis (Boonton Township), Carol Hoffmann (Milford Borough), Sara Lipsett (Cherry Hill Township), Phyllis Marchand (Princeton Township), Pam Mount (Lawrenceville Township), Douglas Newman (Village of South Orange), Art Ondish (Mount Arlington Borough), William Pikolycky (Woodbine Borough) and Fred Profeta (Maplewood Township).

In 2006, at the same time that the Mayors Committee was forming, The College of New Jersey was funded by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation to create a “Sustainable Communities Leadership Network.” Concurrently, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities were also working on initiatives to support sustainable communities. The four parties agreed to come together under one banner and collaborate on the program that eventually became Sustainable Jersey. On February 26, 2009, Sustainable Jersey was formally launched at the New Jersey State House in Trenton with a press conference and words of inspiration from the governor.

From 2006 to 2011, the League’s Mayors Committee for a Green Future served as the advisory board that tested and gave candid advice on what works at the local level. This group also served as the head cheerleaders by promoting the program to mayors, community groups and green teams that needed an extra push to register with Sustainable Jersey or make progress.

In 2012, Sustainable Jersey evolved from a partnership into a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a Board of Trustees that took over the role of the Mayors Committee for a Green Future. The League has continued to support and promote Sustainable Jersey and the executive director of League has served as an Ex Officio member of the Sustainable Jersey Board of Trustees since it was formed in 2012.

League Leadership

Colleen Mahr is the current president of the League and the Mayor of Fanwood. Having begun her career in public service as Mayoral Aide in Jersey City, Mayor Mahr rose through the ranks to earn the post of Jersey City’s Assistant Director of Housing and Economic Development. In 2003, Mayor Mahr ran for and won the seat of Mayor in Fanwood. This would become the first of four consecutive terms.



As mayor, she had the opportunity to apply her development experience to Fanwood’s deteriorating downtown. At the time Mayor Mahr took office, blighted conditions and stalled initiatives existed in the Fanwood downtown area. Any former actions for development or investment had not advanced due to site challenges and community opposition. Working closely with the community, a new vision was established for the renewal of Downtown Fanwood.



Mayor Mahr is an advocate of the Sustainable Jersey program and at the 2019 New Jersey Sustainability Summit, she led a well-attended panel discussion entitled “A Mayor’s Perspective: Advancing Sustainability Initiatives at the Local Level.”

Mayor Mahr is the president of the League's Executive Board which serves as the policy-setting body that represents New Jersey’s municipal governments. Over the years, Sustainable Jersey has had the privilege to work with the following mayors who served as the president of the League’s Executive Board: James L. Cassella, Albert Kelly, Joseph Tempesta, Jr., Brian Wahler, Suzanne Walters, Janice S. Mironov, Arthur R. Ondish, Chuck Chiarello, James Anzaldi and Timothy McDonough.



William G. Dressel, Jr. led the League as its executive director for 20 years, providing municipal officials good advice and impassioned advocacy. He retired in 2015 after a 41-year career with the League. New Jersey legislators relied on Bill for an accurate and articulate appraisal of the impact of state policy options on New Jersey municipalities and property taxpayers. Bill has a no-nonsense

style of leadership; he listened to the mayors asking for greater support for sustainability issues and immediately took steps to create and populate the Mayors Committee for a Green Future. The Sustainable Jersey partnership married the political savvy and network of the mayors, the strong infrastructure and communication abilities of the League and the technical expertise of academic and governmental institutions.



Bill included Sustainable Jersey at the 2009 League Annual Conference in Atlantic City with an exhibit booth, workshops and a special luncheon. On November 17, 2009, Sustainable Jersey held its first Annual Awards Luncheon during the League's Conference to recognize the first 34 municipalities that achieved Sustainable Jersey certification. At the time, Bill was a bit surprised by the overwhelming response to the Sustainable Jersey awards event; he said, "The energy around the awards and the Sustainable Jersey lunch is incredible. We have over 320 mayors and municipal staff registered for the awards lunch and we are still trying to accommodate people that want to be a part of this landmark event." He added, "The overwhelming response speaks to the success of the Sustainable Jersey program and municipalities' desire to create sustainable communities."

Michael J. Darcy, CAE, is the current executive director of the League. He also serves as an Ex Officio member of the Sustainable Jersey Board of Trustees. In the June 2019 New Jersey Municipalities magazine, Michael wrote, "Happy anniversary to the more than 400 municipalities who participate in Sustainable Jersey. It was 10 years ago when Sustainable Jersey came into being through the work of The College of New Jersey, the Dodge Foundation, mayors and municipal officials, and with guidance and support from the League and state agencies. You should all have pride in the actions you take to promote sustainability. Your actions are the laboratory where successful approaches to sustainability are tested, perfected and shared with others. Sustainable Jersey's actions have become part of the national best practices copied by jurisdictions around the country. Here's to 10 more years promoting sustainability."

