



Osceola County Office of Sustainability Sets Course

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Osceola County, Florida – Osceola County’s new Office of Sustainability has an ambitious “to-do” list that focuses on creating a five-year work plan, outreach and communication strategies (including benchmarking), and overseeing an increased emphasis on the sustainability of County operations.

The workplan implements the 2017 [*Strategies for a Sustainable Future*](#) Report and the 2020 [*Green Initiatives Element*](#), director Susan Caswell said.

Main efforts underway or on tap include:

- Building design and retrofit
- Options to begin replacing fleet vehicles with hybrid or electric
- An Urban Forest Management Plan
- Forming partnerships with the community for Countywide initiatives

“Focusing on making our County and our community more sustainable is an effort that happens with many small steps but ultimately they all lead toward a bigger picture and a strategy that makes Osceola County a better place for everyone to live, learn, work and play,” said Commission Chairman Brandon Arrington. “Centralizing our efforts in one office with a person who is familiar with what we’ve been doing and capable of implementing the County Commission’s vision will make an immediate and credible difference in our efforts to incorporate sustainability into everyday actions, as well as our long-range vision.”

Caswell is familiar with the county’s quest for sustainability, as she’s been working on these issues for several years through the landmark 2017 report.

“The report put a spotlight on the benefits of encouraging a development pattern that is fiscally successful, creating quality neighborhoods that offer mixed uses and connectivity,” said Caswell. “There is a demonstrable benefit to making sure that happens, and we have processes in place to facilitate this.”

The Green Initiatives Element, introduced into the County's "comp plan" in 2020, covers more traditional sustainability topics such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, using alternative energy, expanding recycling, and composting, among others.

The office was approved as part of the FY 2021-22 budget and announced formally at the State of the County in October. Initially, Caswell will focus on County operations to ensure the County is operating sustainably as it partners with the community to do the same. Sustainability is really about everything the County does, so as part of this expanded effort, Osceola will establish an interdepartmental group to identify ways to operate that don't compromise the future, Caswell noted.

The County is currently finalizing a Sustainability Audit for Osceola Heritage Park (OHP), with recommendations due by the end of the year. OHP will be a showpiece for the County's efforts as it demonstrates innovation and commitment to sustainability.

Highlights will include energy efficiency and alternative energy; water conservation measures, including rainwater for irrigation; alternative paving materials; reducing and recycling materials used during major events, such as water bottles, cooking oil and cardboard; and compostable flatware, paper and plastic.

Environmentally, expanding the tree program based on recommendations from the soon to be completed Urban Forest Management Plan – and seeing if residents are interested in composting are on the to-do list.

Meanwhile, the County is already doing a lot of things that make how it operates as an organization more sustainable.

The County has transitioned to LED lights in its facilities and conducts energy audits to find projects for energy cost savings. Other projects include:

- Water fountains with bottle fillers to cut down on use of plastics
- Use of zero volatile organic compound paint, which is better for air quality, starting a decade ago
- 'Florida friendly' landscape such as at the new Campbell City campus to reduce water use for irrigation
- Better insulation and efficiencies for new buildings