

Promoting Environmental Sustainability Initiatives: The Role of a Chamber of Commerce

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Abstract:

A significant positive association exists between environmental stewardship and sustainable economic growth. Taking this into consideration, this study explores the role that a chamber of commerce, specifically the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce, can take to advance environmental sustainability initiatives within its area of influence and among its members. This study was informed by interviews conducted with environmentally progressive chambers of commerce across the nation, interviews with key Saratoga County Chamber members, and through a survey administered to Saratoga County Chamber members. The findings of this study culminated in a series of recommendations as to how the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce could best promote environmental sustainability initiatives. Recommendations highlight four potential avenues for the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce to address environmental sustainability: the establishment of a green business network, continued and expanded partnerships, the enactment of a steering committee, and the implementation of localized initiatives.

Introduction:

For years environmental sustainability and economic development have been positioned in direct conflict. It was believed that environmental interests and economic growth could not be balanced, and consequently the environment was sacrificed in the name of profit maximization (York et al. 2003). More recently, however, there has been a shift in people's core values away from the idea of growing the economy through the exploitation and degradation of nature, toward the notion that sustainable economic growth can only be achieved when environmental resources are protected; as all economies at their foundation depend on functioning natural systems and resources (Schafer 2006). This is evidenced by Schofer and Granados (2006), who found that the practices associated with environmental sustainability had a significant positive impact on economic growth between 1980 and 1998. They concluded that environmental policies, laws, and organizations were statistically associated with increases in investments, expanding industry and service sectors, and faster growing economies during this time period. In light of these findings, a healthy economy is one that reconciles economic prosperity with sustainable practices. This idea is reflected in recent market trends whereby large corporations like Lowe's and Home Depot have begun catering to the demands for sustainable products that consumers and NGOs have voiced (Christmann et al. 2002). Changes like these are the result of informed bodies that have the ability to effectively distribute information to businesses, the government, and to consumers. In this way, these organizations act as mediators and leaders for progress.

A chamber of commerce is one of these types of organizations, acting as a liaison between community members and their government. To this effect, chambers of commerce create successful community structures by stimulating economic progress and business

development. Chambers are comprised of community members who are engaged in trade, industry, or public services and hope to profit from a working relationship with their government by directing chamber and government policy as a single voice, and by receiving valuable governmental information (Pilgram & Meyer 1995). With the support of a chamber of commerce, a government can be more responsive and more useful to business needs, thereby acting as an engine to promote a more efficient and prosperous economy (Pilgram & Meyer 1995). As such a powerful institution within a community, and in consideration of environmental problems relevant to the area (climate change, acid rain, species extinction etc.), it is imperative that a chamber of commerce also focus on channeling environmental sustainability through the various sectors it represents.

The Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce holds that its mission is “to initiate and provide programs and services which will enhance members’ ability to successfully conduct their business and to enhance and promote a healthy economy, making Saratoga County an ideal place to work, live and visit” (www.saratoga.org/chamber). While much of upstate New York is economically depressed, Saratoga County is one of two growth areas in Upstate, and has seen population grow 9.5% between 2000 and 2010, approximately triple that of nearby counties (U.S. Census Bureau 2010), making Saratoga’s Chamber of Commerce particularly important. Currently, the Saratoga County Chamber has over 3,000 members and has been recognized as one of the most innovative chambers in the nation (www.saratoga.org). Yet, despite its size and distinction, the Saratoga County Chamber has currently taken only small steps to explore environmentally sustainable initiatives; examples include providing information and links for eco-tourist trips to Saratoga, and information about energy audits, renewable energy, buying local, recycling programs, and green building certifications (www.saratoga.org/chamber).

Saratoga County is already an environmentally active area, and these few initiatives will make future environmental progress easier, however, there are many more avenues for environmental progress that the Chamber can be promoting for Saratoga County.

There are currently several broad-reaching environmental activities in Saratoga county, such as weekly Farmers' Markets that promote local and organic foods, Sustainable Saratoga, an environmentally progressive citizen run organization, and Shared Access Saratoga, a social media site aimed at remodeling Saratoga's shared spaces to improve mobility and encourage alternative modes of transportation like walking and bicycling, along with other initiatives (SFMA 2011; Prestwick Chase Farmers' Market 2011; Sustainable Saratoga 2009; Shared Access, Saratoga 2011). Therefore, by promoting environmental sustainability, the Saratoga Chamber of Commerce would be filling a role that has already been identified as important by Saratoga County citizens and businesses.

Using the Chamber of Commerce to encourage sustainability in Saratoga could improve economic conditions throughout the county. By encouraging sustainable practices of all kinds, the Chamber of Commerce has the ability to make the Saratoga region a more desirable place to live, visit, and conduct business. This notion is reinforced by studies conducted by the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI) which estimated the market segment for purchases made by individuals invested in sustainable practices is expected to grow from \$355 billion to \$845 billion by the year 2015 (LOHAS Online, 2009). Studies have also found that people prefer living in locations characteristic of smart growth and sustainable development (Litman, 2008).

The implications for this are significant: by attracting more residents and new businesses the Chamber can bolster tax base, create high paying jobs, and revitalize downtown areas (Iams et al. 2006). With this increase in economic activity the Chamber of Commerce is subsequently freer

to push for local policies that help bring about subsidies, tax incentives, and new regulatory standards for business. Additionally, the Chamber of Commerce can take initiatives to keep money, and the exchange of dollars, as local as possible.

Along with improved economic conditions, the Chamber of Commerce also has the power to encourage and foster sustainable practices, which improve environmental quality. Environmentally related initiatives have the potential to decrease energy costs, thereby fostering economic stability and sustainability in Saratoga (Pennock 2011; Jacomit et al. 2009). Implementing environmental strategies in Saratoga will also mitigate environmental and human health hazards that are often associated with highly developed areas (EPA 2001). Environmental initiatives can abate habitat and ecosystem degradation, improve air and water quality, lessen risk of toxin contamination, and work toward curbing global climate change. The implementation of environmentally sustainable practices would also be effective in both decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, and in reducing issues regarding water quality and quantity in the area. Studies show that environmentally minded practices can substantially reduce the amount of storm runoff, help communities conserve water, and direct management toward an already existing infrastructure (Van Lare 2006). A decrease in storm water runoff would be advantageous to the Saratoga community and would likely have an overall reduction in the amount of sediments and pollutants entering the watershed (epa.gov). By providing incentives for reduction in energy use, the Saratoga County Chamber can also promote practices and developmental strategies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants (smartgrowthamerica.org; Iams et al 2006). Additionally, sustainable development can encourage land use practices, which reduce pollution and waste (Burchell et al. 2000).

An environmentally conscious Saratoga would thus add to the prominence that already

resounds within the county. If Saratoga's Chamber of Commerce were to become more involved in promoting environmentally sustainable practices by enacting environmentally related strategies that permeate many levels of business, the city could see a surge in consumerism, tourism, development, and economic growth while preserving the unique culture and history that define the region.

This project assesses the role that chambers of commerce play in promoting sustainable development and economic growth for its affiliates. This information will be coupled with an analysis of the current role of Saratoga County's Chamber of Commerce and will also explore areas for future progress in the Chamber's role for promoting economic growth and environmental sustainability. This research will provide recommendations for the Chamber of Commerce and for Saratoga County to move forward with environmental practices that promote economic stability.

Methods:

Our methods were a threefold process. We began by contacting and interviewing twenty chambers of commerce located throughout the nation (Appendix A). Representative chambers of commerce were contacted based on recommendations from professionals in the sustainable development industry and from Chambers For Innovation--an existing network of chambers that are working towards environmental sustainability in their communities (chambersforinnovation.com). Efforts were made to speak with chambers whose size and area of influence is comparable to that of the Saratoga Chamber of Commerce. In certain instances, when this goal could not be maintained, the discrepancy in size between the interviewed chamber and Saratoga Chamber of Commerce was both noted and accounted for in the interpretation of results. Therefore, while there was some inconsistency in the size of the chambers interviewed, our interviews still provided valuable information on the potential avenues by which the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce can address environmental sustainability.

Next, we conducted interviews with representative members of the Chamber of Commerce to determine how the members view the role of the Chamber of Commerce, their opinion on the effectiveness of environmental strategies already in place, what type of environmental initiatives they would like to see in Saratoga, and how they would like to see the Chamber move toward implementing more sustainable practices. The contacts chosen were based on the potential leadership roles their businesses play in the community both economically and environmentally. In addition, businesses were contacted from each of the following sectors so that a wide range of interests could be surveyed: construction, energy, food, manufacturing, raw goods, and tourism.

Using the information gained from these conversations, we structured a short survey that was sent out to the over 3,000 Chamber of Commerce members via a Chamber online newsletter (Appendix B). Due to limited initial responses, we sent out an additional 100 emails to randomly selected chamber members. This survey expanded on the themes that were uncovered during the conversations with other Chambers of Commerce and key Saratoga County Chamber members. The survey results were used to determine the main environmental strategies that stakeholders view as viable and necessary for maintaining an economically and environmentally sustainable county, and how the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce could best promote these strategies. With this information, we narrowed the focus of our study to several environmentally related initiatives that we hope will be implemented in Saratoga.

Finally, the results of our study were presented to the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce in hopes that the environmental initiative we explored will be implemented by the Chamber of Commerce and adopted by Saratoga County businesses.

Results:

Part I: Chamber of Commerce Interviews

In order to carry out informed interviews and make realistic recommendations to the Saratoga Chamber of Commerce, we first needed to gain a better understanding of the actions currently being taken by other chambers of commerce to address issues of environmental sustainability. This informed our project with a realistic scope of initiatives that a chamber such as the Saratoga Chamber could promote.

Analysis of our chamber interviews revealed that a chamber's approach to addressing environmental sustainability is variable. Essentially, each chamber that was contacted examined sustainability slightly differently. A small percentage of chambers had championed several environmental issues, and did so by utilizing multi-pronged initiatives, which approached environmental concerns on several different levels. Conversely, many of the chambers we spoke with ignored the subject all together. Therefore, while each chamber acted independently in how they addressed this issue, our findings show that there are some general trends and procedures that exemplify how a chamber can promote environmental sustainability, should they choose to do so. The most prevalent tools that chambers are using to serve these issues include the implementation of a green business network, legislative aid, city partnerships, and subcommittees.

Green Business Network

The implementation of a green business network is a popular mode by which chambers are addressing issues of environmental sustainability. There is no single working definition for what a green business network entails, but generally speaking, it serves as a mechanism of

distinction to recognize, promote, and facilitate growth among industries already achieving, or working toward environmental stewardship and economic prosperity. By supporting a green business network, a chamber of commerce enables its members to brand themselves, and thus become more marketable to consumers. Among the chambers that were interviewed for this study, examples of green business networks can be seen in Fayetteville, Arkansas, Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Berkeley, California. Fayetteville managed its green business network by working with an external group out of the University of Arkansas. Together the two organizations collaborated to create the parameters for establishing a green business network. This included the formation of a review process, a rubric for evaluation, and consultation for how a chamber member could work toward achieving environmentally sustainable initiatives, and subsequent green business network status. Similar to Fayetteville, the Chapel Hill Chamber also worked with its local flagship universities to establish a green business network. In doing so they have been successful in creating the *Green Plus* business network, which is now utilized by chambers throughout the nation. The actions taken by the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce exemplify a different way by which a chamber can promote a green business network. Unlike Fayetteville, the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce did not create its own green business network. Instead, they work directly with an already established network, Alameda Green Business Network, to aid their chamber members in reaching their environmental goals. The Berkeley Chamber works to coordinate chamber members with the Alameda Green Business network, and also provides services to help them achieve membership into the network by way of expert consultation. The Berkeley Chamber demonstrates how a chamber can work within an existing framework to promote the values and interests of its members. All three instances exhibit different modes that a chamber can use to encourage a green business network among its

members, in light of differing circumstances and goals.

Partnerships

Another avenue by which chambers are addressing issues of sustainability is with the aid of politically informed individuals or bodies. This is an important area to address because there are inherent political barriers in accomplishing any sort of significant environmental change within an area. This may be related to a myriad of issues such as zoning, energy, or climate legislation. Having informed bodies in contact with chambers allows chambers to provide their members with essential data for advancing sustainability-based initiatives. For example the Cambridge, Massachusetts Chamber works with the local government to coordinate development and facilitate communication between the chamber and other large area stakeholders such as MIT and Harvard. This is significant for several reasons. By bringing together politicians, large academic institutions, and the chamber, plans for area business growth can be made with the input of all interested parties. This allows for a greater efficiency and ability to holistically examine sustainability initiatives. In Berkeley, the role of politicians is more explicit, and they are often brought in to speak to chamber members about new climate legislation, and how best to comply. In doing so chamber members are able to voice their concerns to the politically informed, while also learning valuable information on how they can reduce their environmental impact. Political bodies can also act as a voice to streamline the transmission of other valuable information to chamber members. For example, by communicating with lawmakers, chamber members are likely to be more aware of federal or state subsidies for renewable energy. In both of these examples contact with local elected officials increased communication and expanded the capacity by which these environmental issues are addressed.

Other examples of successful partnerships can be seen in the actions taken by the Jackson

Hole, Wyoming chamber. The Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce works with Sustainable Travel International (STI), an organization that promotes tourism to environmentally responsible destinations. STI helped Jackson Hole form an alliance with a sister city in Canada as a means of motivating local business to adopt more sustainable practices in each area. This city partnership encourages businesses in both areas to become involved in environmentally related initiatives, while also drawing environmentally minded tourists from around the world to the area. To further promote its economy, while still having a mind toward environmentalism, the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce joined the Geo-tourism Stewardship Council, a program run by National Geographic that supports tourism to destinations that have a commitment to sustaining the geo-heritage of a location. In this way, the culture and history of the Yellowstone Area that surrounds Jackson Hole is preserved while the city's economy thrives.

Steering Committee

Formation of committees and consultation of area stakeholders is another means by which chambers are addressing issues of environmental and economic sustainability. This type of action is particularly helpful for chambers that do not have all of the necessary resources to address environmental sustainability. Utilization of these strategies often results in the formation of a subcommittee or relationship with existing local bodies that already work to address issues of sustainability. An example of this can be seen in the Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce and their formation of the Central Florida Partnership—a group spearheaded by Orlando Regional Chamber members who felt the need to address more civic duties. To accomplish this, members formed a separate group from the chamber and identified several goals, such as improving transportation via light rail and high-speed rail systems. While the

Central Florida Partnership is not technically part of the Orlando Chamber, the two groups communicate and work together to address the goals outlined by the Central Florida Partnership.

The previously mentioned examples are all avenues of how chambers across the country are currently addressing issues of environmental sustainability in their area. In each example, chambers of commerce have been able to promote environmental initiatives in the public sphere by improving services and increasing transparency.

Part II: Interviews with Representative Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce Members

To gain an understanding of how Saratoga's business owners viewed the connection between economic sustainability and environmentally related initiatives, we conducted a series of interviews with key members of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce. From the construction sector, we spoke with both a small and a large firm. The smaller firm employs approximately 3 to 4 people, and deals predominantly in environmentally sustainable architecture in Saratoga County and surrounding regions. The larger firm employs approximately 20 people and deals in commercial, industrial, and general construction.

In the energy sector, we spoke with an energy purchasing company that works with chambers to facilitate group energy buying for chamber members and municipalities.

Additionally, we spoke to an alternative energy conservation firm that seeks to provide energy reduction through efficient generation and conservation. Both businesses are small in size, employing fewer than five workers.

With regard to food-related businesses, we contacted both a medium and large sized businesses. The medium sized business has 23 employees, and maintains that its mission is to

provide the community with natural and organic products to nurture the overall health of the community.

Information obtained on the raw goods sector was gathered from speaking with a small design showroom as well as a large lumber business. The smaller firm focuses on interior finishes that are environmentally sustainable and non-toxic. This small business provides products and services to residential homeowners and commercial contractors. The company is focused on educating and inspiring people to make better choices in their lives that work toward creating a healthy environment. The larger firm we spoke with employs approximately 650 people and is located at several locations throughout New York. They deal mainly with contractors, but also do business with independent purchasers.

In manufacturing we spoke with a large multinational printing business with over 23,000 employees and 4 billion dollars in annual revenue in 2011. They have facilities in the US, Canada, Europe, and Latin America. Their Saratoga location is 1 million square feet and employs over 800 employees.

From the tourism sector, we spoke with a non-profit land conservation organization whose mission is to conserve special places and open spaces in Saratoga County. This organization manages several central programs including a community planning program which fosters smart growth planning; a trails program that works with local municipalities to make a trail network for transportation and recreation; a land conservation program that works to conserve places like agricultural land, historical sites; and an outreach and education program that provides opportunities for people to enjoy open spaces and to get people to be outside and view nature. We also spoke with a small historic hotel located in the heart of downtown Saratoga whose mission is to provide the best lodging experience possible to visitors of Saratoga Springs.

Each of the Chamber members that we interviewed expressed that their reason for joining the Chamber of Commerce was to partner with an organization that will help promote their business interests in the community. Opening doors of opportunity for growth and development and networking were cited as the main themes among responses, yet other members explained that they thought a partnership with the Chamber could improve quality of life and the overall viability of the Saratoga community.

In general, the Chamber of Commerce members that we spoke with were aware that an effort to work toward environmental sustainability in Saratoga could benefit both their businesses' viability as well as the community's social and economic sustainability. Our contact from the natural foods business commented that there should be a "balance between economic growth and ruining what makes the town really nice." Other Chamber members that we spoke with from various sectors, both environmental and non, made note that many Saratogian business owners and residents appreciate having a higher quality of life, and they are looking at environmentally-related initiatives as a way to achieve that. Some of the Chamber members with whom we spoke were already incorporating environmentally-related initiatives into their business model, including composting, recycling when possible, using compact fluorescent lighting, and associating with sustainable organizations such as Sustainable Saratoga and the Clean World Program.

These Chamber members made suggestions about how the Chamber of Commerce could best promote and support environmental initiatives in Saratoga. Suggestions included relaying information via various social networks such as e-mail, Facebook, and Twitter, and organizing comprehensive programs that were centered on issues in which business owners had expressed interest. Another suggestion involved specialized business/environmental consultants

that could formulate plans for environmentalism that fit in with a particular business's economic and social values. One Chamber member recommended creating a steering committee made of high level individuals with common interests that could brainstorm, develop, and implement ideas that address environmentalism, economic stability, and social values. Another spokesperson suggested that the Chamber of Commerce organize recycling drives for CFL light bulbs, electronics, batteries, etc. There was also a shared sentiment among Chamber members for the creation of a green business network.

Part III: Survey Results

With the information gathered from interviews with the key Chamber of Commerce members above, we created a survey that was sent out to all of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce business members, of which there are over 3,000. While our response rate was quite low (n=21), some conclusions can be drawn from the results.

First, basic questions regarding the size and type of business were asked to get a sense of the business demographic that was responding. A vast majority of the businesses, 81.0% have been in business for more than five years, with 9.5% being in business for less than one year (Figure 1). In general, respondents' businesses were small, with 61.9% employing between 1 and 5 employees (Figure 2). The respondents identified with sixteen varying business sectors, the most prominent among them included accommodation or food service, non-profit, and services (Figure 3).

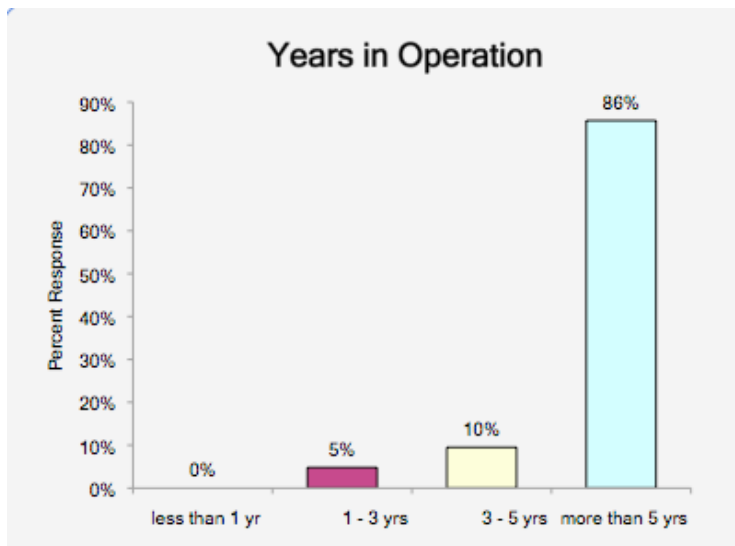


Figure 1: Years in Operation, Reported by members of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce

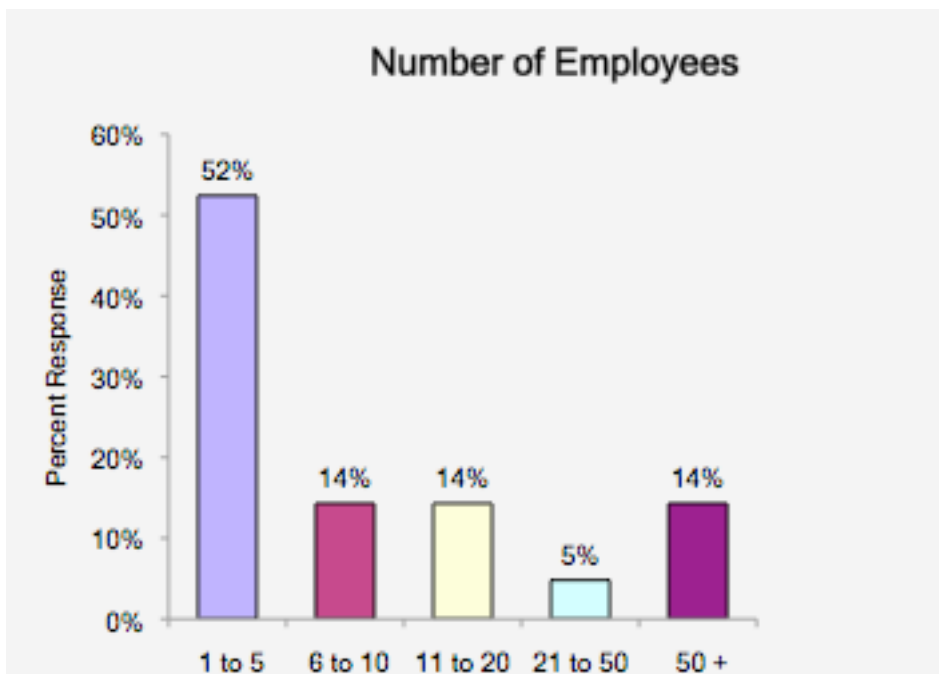


Figure 2: Number of Employees, Reported by members of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce

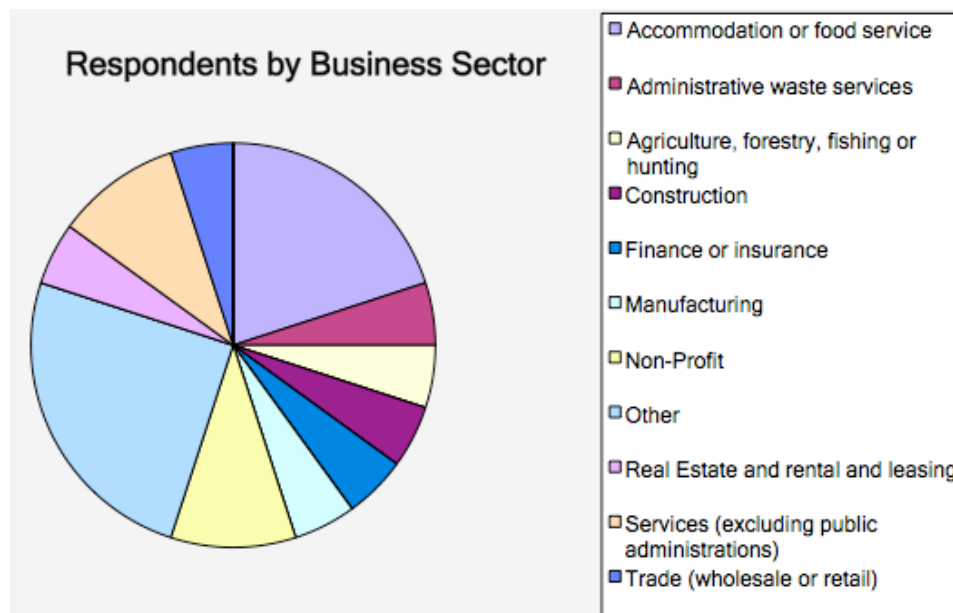


Figure 3: Respondents by Business Sector, Reported by members of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce

Next, we wanted to know how involved and interested Saratoga businesses were in environmentally related initiatives. Approximately 76% of respondents said that they consider the economic sustainability of their business to be positively linked with environmentally related initiatives (Figure 4). Moreover, 81.0% of respondents identified that they were already incorporating environmental initiatives into their business model, including reusing and recycling paper, plastic, cardboard, and metals, composting, and sourcing local products (Figure 5).

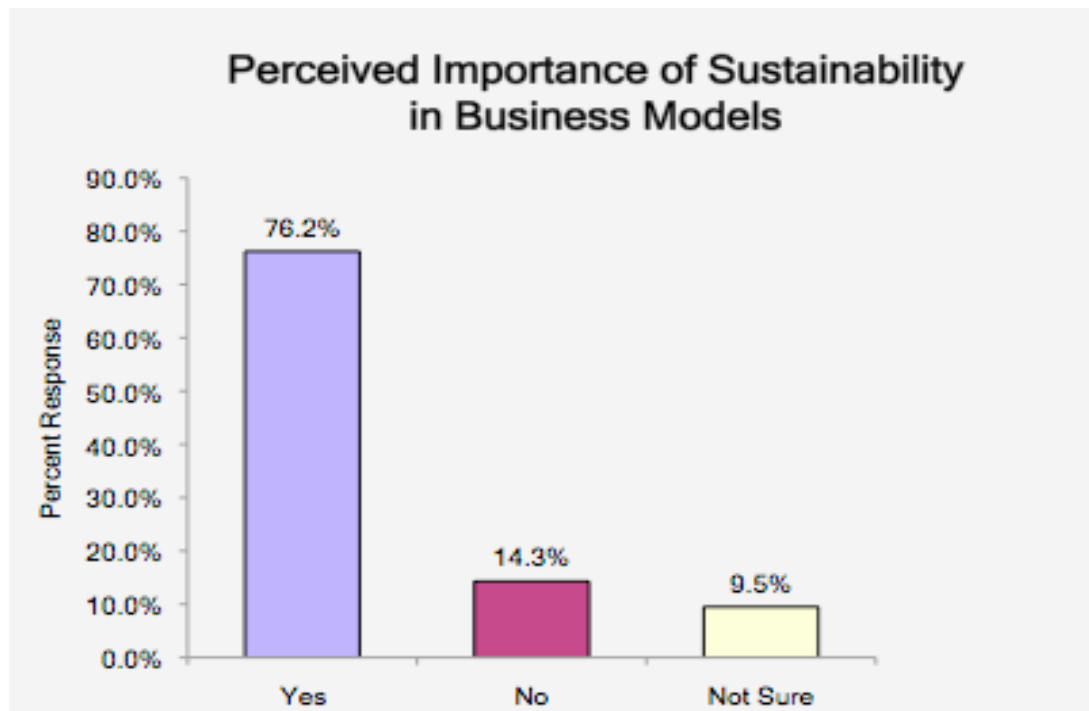


Figure 4: Perceived Importance of Sustainability in Business Models, Reported by members of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce

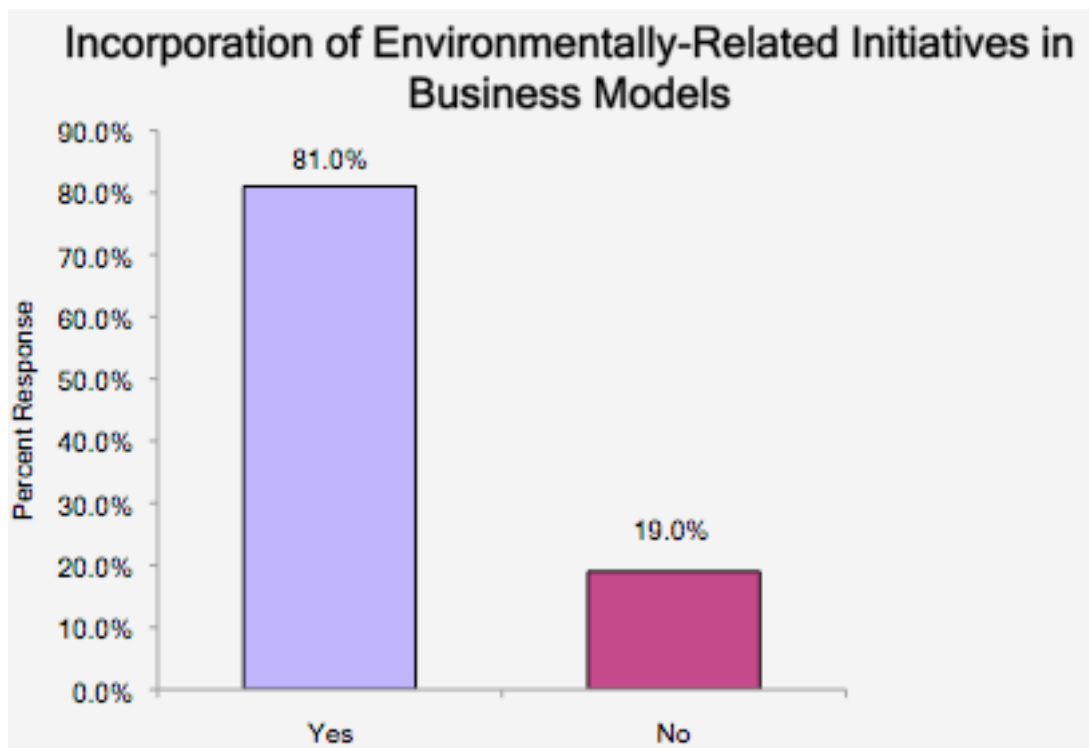


Figure 5: Incorporation of Environmentally-Related Initiatives in Business Models, Reported by members of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce

Our final set of questions focused on how to best encourage more environmental responsibility in Saratoga. We found that the majority of respondents noted that initiatives that would be beneficial to their business included renewable energy, recycling, energy audits, and composting (Figure 6). However, 10.5% of respondents answered that no environmentally related initiatives or services would be beneficial to their business. We were also interested in how best the Chamber of Commerce could support environmentally related initiatives in Saratoga, of which the most popular responses included facilitating conferences and dialogue and partnering with existing bodies that are already working toward environmental sustainability. On the other hand, one respondent noted that the best way the Chamber could support environmental initiatives was to ban mandated environmental programs all together, and another added to his response that environmental initiatives would neither help nor hurt their business.

When asked whether they would like to learn more about environmentally related initiatives that could be incorporated into their business models, 61.9% of chamber members said yes, and some respondents specified areas of interest, which included alternative energy and recycling. When prompted, several respondents also had ideas about localized environmentally related initiatives that the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce could sponsor to improve the economic vitality and livability of the region. Suggestions included adapting city streetlights to lessen light pollution, adopting alternative energy sources, increasing recycling programs, protecting and conserving open spaces like parks, waterfronts, and farmland, improving and expanding public transportation, and closing narrow downtown streets to cars, making them accessible to pedestrians only. One anonymous respondent made the claim that “if we have ‘Meatless Mondays,’ can we not also have ‘No Traffic Tuesdays,’ where there is a day that the main downtown area is blocked off to all traffic except emergency, bicycle, and foot traffic?”

Conversely, one respondent explained that he would rather the Chamber not focus on promoting environmentally related initiatives at all, emphasizing the point that while the majority of respondents were in favor of environmental initiatives there are some who were not.

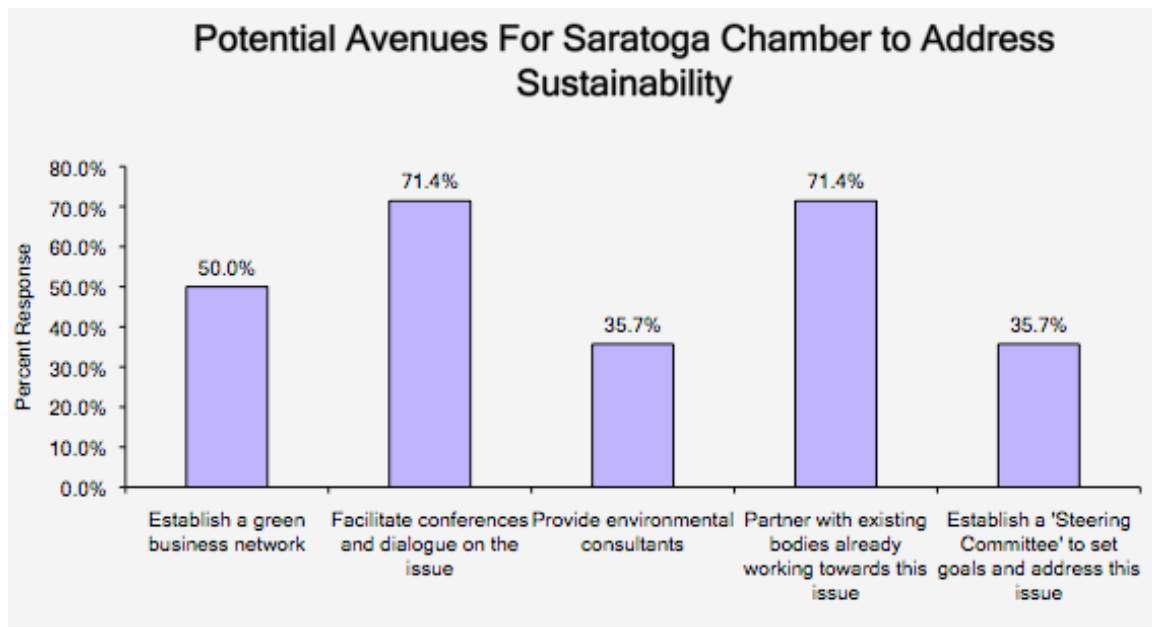


Figure 6: Potential Avenues for Saratoga Chamber to Address Sustainability, Reported by members of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce

Recommendations

Saratoga County is a unique area in that it is rich with culture and history that is constantly celebrated by the community and by new and returning visitors. Saratoga's population and economy continues to grow while most areas of New York are facing declining economic trends. With such notable growth and economic development also comes the responsibility to ensure that the natural environment is preserved, not only for ecological reasons but also for the economic sustainability and the wonderful culture and history that define the region. This study focused on the potential for promoting environmental sustainability in the Saratoga business community in conjunction with the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce. In order for environmental sustainability to become a priority in Saratoga, or in any other place, its community members and businesses must have a vested interest in the preservation of the qualities they value in their region, whether that be natural aesthetics, open spaces, clean air, water, and streets, rich culture, or unique historical sites. With that said, this study revealed several strategies that could be implemented in Saratoga County to ensure that the charm that draws people to Saratoga year after year will be sustained for many generations.

Analysis of our chamber interviews, Saratoga County Chamber member interviews, and survey results show significant prospects for the role that the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce can play in supporting the economic, cultural, historic, and ecologic longevity of Saratoga County. The actions recommended in this section are informed by the twenty-one respondent chamber members from our survey, as well as interviews that have been administered to ten Saratoga County Chamber Members, and twenty different chambers of commerce located throughout the United States. It should be noted that the recommendations are influenced by our

interpretations of what has been most successful in other areas, as well as what we see as attainable for Saratoga based on our findings. Therefore, while we trust that these measures could improve the economic and environmental conditions of Saratoga County, they do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce.

Green Business Network:

Based on our research we believe that the Saratoga Chamber of Commerce should make strides to facilitate, create, and promote a green business network. As previously mentioned, there is not a universal definition for the limitations of what constitutes a green business network. That being said, they generally tend to be a network of businesses that have been evaluated and certified as having a commitment to addressing issues of environmental sustainability on several different levels such as but not restricted to: reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, locally sourced materials for production, recycling, use of renewable energy, education outreach, conservation of water resources, and lower waste stream.

This conclusion is informed by the findings in all three methods of our data collection and is reflected in Figures 1, 4, 5, and 6. Figure 1 demonstrates that the majority of our respondents (86%) have been in business for 5 or more years. This is important because the success of a green business network is ultimately dependent on the longevity of the businesses that comprise it. In essence, you cannot have a business network if there are no long-term businesses. Figures 4, 5, and 6 complement Figure 1 by showing the support the surveyed members have for environmentally minded initiatives, such as a green business network. Figure 4 demonstrates that the 76.2% of respondents perceive environmentally sustainable initiatives as important to their business model while Figure 5 shows that 80.1% of respondents already

incorporated some environmentally related initiatives into their business models. Lastly, Figure 6 shows that half of the survey respondents see a green business network as a potential avenue for the Chamber to address sustainability.

These survey results are supported by both our Saratoga Chamber member interviews, as well as our interviews with several chambers located throughout the nation. In our interviews with chamber members, half of the members supported the idea that a green business network would be beneficial to the Saratoga County Chamber of commerce. This sentiment was shared by both small and large businesses from a variety of sectors—giving reason to believe that despite having a small sample size, our results may be indicative of consensus within the chamber community. As discussed in our results section, we also heard from several chambers that have successfully implemented a green business network. In our discussions with these chambers, they shared with us the important role their green business networks have had in identifying and branding the more environmentally active chamber members (refer to results section for chambers with successful green business networks). With all of these findings in mind, we believe there is evidence to suggest that a green business network for Saratoga County is not only desirable but would also be well utilized.

Partnerships

The continued work on the part of the chamber to maintain and expand relationships with firms and bodies already addressing environmental sustainability is another route for the chamber to examine environmental concerns within Saratoga County. While the Saratoga Chamber is already doing this in some capacity, we believe there could be more reliance on these prevailing environmental voices in the community.

This notion is well represented in the results of our survey and interviews. As evidenced by the aforementioned importance of Figures 1, 4, and 5, we believe there is reason to believe that a wide range of chamber members see environmental initiatives as beneficial. This is best seen in Figure 6 which shows that 71.4% of survey respondents see partnerships with existing bodies already working towards sustainability as a viable way for the Saratoga Chamber to address issues of environmental sustainability. Our chamber interviews back up this finding.

In all of our chamber interviews, every chamber that was successfully responding to environmental concerns was in some fashion utilizing and relying on exterior bodies to forward initiatives. This was most apparent in the utilization of institutions of higher education, with Fayetteville, Chapel Hill, and Berkeley each relying on state universities for support in design and implementation of their green business networks.

The Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce could expand their ability to tackle environmental issues by partnering with more groups already invested in environmental issues. For example, while Saratoga does not have any large higher education institutions, there are smaller institutions such as Empire State College, Adirondack Community College, and Skidmore College. Utilizing the various groups of people at these types of institutions, including both students and faculty, proved successful at other chambers and would likely yield similar results for Saratoga. These institutions could help in conducting valuable research, providing interns, and educating chamber members on certain environmental issues.

There are also several groups outside of academia that could provide important services to the Saratoga County Chamber. Organizations such as Sustainable Saratoga, Saratoga Healthy Transportation Network, and Cool Cities are all contributing positively to the environmental concerns in the area. By working with these groups the Chamber of Commerce can bring all

interested parties together and potentially expedite traditional means of interaction and communication while streamlining environmental initiatives already underway.

Steering Committee

The third approach we see as attainable for the Saratoga Chamber of Commerce is to establish a steering committee. While this was not a common tool used by the chambers in our interviews, we believe it to be the natural progression of the aforementioned strategies. By establishing a green business network and increasing relationships with existing bodies the Chamber of Commerce has the ability to create a sub-group of members who have already expressed interest in these issues. A successful example of this is the Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce and its work to establish the Central Florida Partnership (see results).

This group, which was comprised of area stakeholders and leading businesses, effectively serves as an arm for the area to pursue more civic duties, including environmental initiatives.

By establishing a group of empowered stakeholders, the Saratoga Chamber could be more successful in accomplishing many of its goals, both civic and environmental. Having a steering committee would also shift some of the burden away from the Chamber towards the individuals and businesses that have a larger capacity to address the issue at hand. Consider a situation in which Saratoga confronts a water shortage, having a committee which comprises many of the large water users in the area (Skidmore College, Quad Graphics, and Global Foundries) would allow them to work in alliance with each other to curb the problem, avoiding the "red tape" and timely legislature that often slows or impedes progress.

Localized Initiatives

Finally, our last recommendation is the implementation of localized initiatives. Small-scale initiatives taken on by several businesses or even one business could be a significant step toward environmental sustainability in Saratoga County. Initiatives that were suggested by survey respondents, such as “No Traffic Tuesdays,” (as mentioned in the results section), include excellent examples of ways that Saratoga could promote environmentalism and preserve the character of Saratoga. The above strategies (Green Business Network, Partnerships, and Steering Committee) could all work to support the formation, implementation, and success of localized initiatives.

Limitations:

Although we obtained valuable information from this study, several limitations occurred that might have distorted some of our results. Our first difficulty arose in our inability to contact some of the chambers we believed to be environmentally progressive. While we were ultimately successful in contacting our target of twenty chambers, some of the chambers we interviewed were not as active in pursuing environmentally related initiatives as we hoped. Therefore, while we were able to learn many valuable strategies, there are potentially more that we were unable to learn about due to limited contact with certain chambers. We also faced limitations due to a statistically insignificant survey response rate. Our survey response rate was lower than desired and is therefore less indicative of chamber member sentiments than we would like. However, because our survey results were consistent with chamber member and chamber interviews, we find value in them as supplemental data.

Work Cited:

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Appendix A

Chambers Contacted:

Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, NC

Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce, SC

Berkeley Chamber of Commerce, CA

Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce, VT

Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, MA

Chapel Hill Carrboro Chamber of Commerce, NC

Cocoa Beach Regional Chamber of Commerce, FL

Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce, AR

Greater Waco Chamber, Tx

Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce, NM

Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, WY

Kona Kohala Chamber of Commerce, Hi

Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce, FL

The Greater New Hope Chamber of Commerce, PA

North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce, SC

Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, PA

Princeton Regional Chamber, NJ

Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce, NM

Sierra Vista Area Chamber, AZ

Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce, NY

Appendix B

Saratoga Chamber of Commerce Sustainability Survey

1. How many years has your business been in operation?
 - a. Less than 1 year
 - b. 1 to 3 years
 - c. 3 to 5 years
 - d. More than 5 years
2. How many workers does your business employ?
 - a. 1 to 5
 - b. 6 to 10
 - c. 11 to 20
 - d. 21 to 50
 - e. 50+
3. Which of the following industry descriptions best fits your organization?
4. Do you think that environmentally-related initiatives can be beneficial to your business's economic prosperity?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not Sure
5. Do you incorporate environmentally-related initiatives into your business model?
 - a. Yes
 - b. NoIf YES please specify
6. What type of environmentally-related initiatives of services would be beneficial to your business?
 - a. Renewable energy
 - b. Improved public transportation
 - c. Educational programs
 - d. Recycling
 - e. Composting
 - f. None
 - g. Other (please specify)
7. Would your business like to learn more about environmentally-related initiatives that could be incorporated into your business model?
 - a. Yes
 - b. NoIf YES please specify
8. How could the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce best support environmentally-related initiatives that might benefit your business?
 - a. Establish a green business network
 - b. Facilitate conferences and dialogue on the issue
 - c. Provide environmental consultants
 - d. Partner with existing bodies already working toward the issue
 - e. Establish a 'Steering Committee' to set goals and address this issue
 - f. Other (please specify)
9. Are there environmentally-related initiatives that the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce could sponsor to improve the livability and economic vitality of the region?