

Remarks of Norfolk Mayor Paul D. Fraim

Sister City Symposium on the Environment  
Local Government Efforts to Realize a Low-carbon Society  
Kitakyushu, Japan  
July 31, 2009

SLIDE 1: Good afternoon.

I am honored to be with you on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Norfolk's sister city partnership with Kitakyushu. You have a beautiful city and, like Norfolk, I can see it is a place where life is celebrated daily.

SLIDE 2: Let me begin by thanking Mayor Kitahashi for spearheading this symposium, and for inviting me to talk with you about our plans and progress for achieving sustainability.

First, a little about us.

Norfolk was founded in 1682, and today is home to more than 234,000 people. SLIDE 3: It is the business, financial, educational and cultural center for Hampton Roads, a region of 1.6 million people. SLIDE 4: Norfolk is linked to its neighbors by an extensive network of highways, bridges and bridge-tunnels.

SLIDE 5: We are centrally located on the East Coast at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay – the largest estuary in the U.S., and a complex, invaluable ecosystem.

We are home to the world's largest naval base, and to one of the largest and busiest ports on the Atlantic seaboard. SLIDE 6: Norfolk is also a city committed to environmental sustainability. We are working hard to achieve a low-carbon society, and to attract environmentally friendly development.

This afternoon I'll focus on three areas:

- 1) How transforming transportation is helping us achieve a low-carbon society.
- 2) How Norfolk is incorporating environmental sustainability into our operations, and
- 3) The importance of community partnerships in moving us toward a sustainable, low-carbon society.

We begin with transportation.

SLIDE 7: Motor vehicles are the largest and fastest-growing source of carbon dioxide emissions in the US. They also consume the largest share of imported oil.

To reduce reliance on foreign oil and achieve meaningful reductions in CO2 emissions, it is clear the U.S. must transform transportation. This includes changing planning policies to include higher density, mixed-use development and mass transit – including rail.

And that's just what we're doing in Norfolk.

SLIDE 8: At this moment, we are about half-way through construction of a light rail system that will run from the eastern edge of the city, through downtown and to our medical center complex.

High quality rail systems encourage compact, walkable communities and reduce reliance on the automobile. They also make it possible to add Transit Oriented Development to city planning and economic development. TOD – as it's called – is defined as high-density, mixed-use development clustered around and near rail stations. Even before ground was broken for light rail, Norfolk had several TOD projects underway downtown.

SLIDE 9: Residential neighborhood design is another way to move towards a low-carbon society. Norfolk's East Beach development – a 100-acre traditional neighborhood on the Chesapeake Bay – is one example.

Designed by Duany Plater-Zyberk – pioneers of New Urbanism – the East Beach master plan preserved natural features like existing stands of mature trees and sand dunes. This helped create a walkable environment where dependence on automobiles is decreased along with airborne pollutants.

SLIDE 10: East Beach was one of five finalists for the 2008 Land Development Visionary Award presented by Sustainable Land Development International.

SLIDE 11: Transit oriented development and neighborhood design are noteworthy because research shows that people who live in compact, “green neighborhoods” close to jobs and activities contribute as much to reducing carbon emissions as people who buy the most efficient hybrid vehicles, but live in car-dependent areas.

Now let's look at how Norfolk is incorporating sustainability into government operations.

SLIDE 12: From accounting and economic development to purchasing and the Zoo, we're looking at everything we do to identify practical actions we can take to reduce carbon emissions.

SLIDE 13: To provide a structure for this program, we are participating in our State Municipal League's 'Green Government Challenge' - a friendly competition among local governments that leads to certification as a 'Green Government.' The Challenge addresses 30 environmental policies and practical actions like green buildings, water conservation, waste management, air quality and energy efficiency.

SLIDE 14: The "Green Team" is an interdepartmental task force of city employees. It is emphasizing energy efficiency in city buildings and operations by reducing electricity, oil and gas use. Not only does this reduce harmful greenhouse gases, it also lowers energy bills and saves taxpayer money.

So far, the Green Team's work has led to an engine idling policy for city vehicles, a "green fleet" policy, tree preservation plans, and energy audits of municipal buildings.

And, thanks to Federal Stimulus funding, we will soon be developing a carbon footprint for Norfolk and the region. This is an important step in defining and managing the sources of carbon in our area.

SLIDE 15: Green building practices are a proven way to reduce carbon emissions, and they are being used in Norfolk's private and public sectors.

SLIDE 16: For example, a green roof on a Norfolk architectural firm's building was the first installed in Hampton Roads. It was designed to reduce the quantity and improve the quality of storm water run-off, lower cooling costs and reduce heat island effect, improve air quality and extend the life of the roof.

SLIDE 17: The Wachovia Center, a new 22-story office, residential and retail development, is on track to become the first certified LEED Silver mixed-use development in Hampton Roads. Not coincidentally, it is located on the downtown light rail line.

SLIDE 18: Our Housing Authority's green building initiatives include Energy Star duplexes in the Grandy Village public housing neighborhood, and the first affordable EarthCraft home in Hampton Roads. Additionally, Norfolk will soon have Virginia's largest green-built townhome community, a 27-unit development built to EarthCraft and EnergyStar standards.

SLIDE 19: We are also building new community recreation centers, a new police precinct and a new downtown central library to LEED standards. In an ultimate statement of sustainability, the library will incorporate a 1900-era building listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Reusing and preserving existing structures, or "recycling" historic older buildings, is an important part of sustainable development.

SLIDE 20: In another pioneering project we redeveloped a 53-acre city landfill into a 9-hole golf course. Today, this former trash pile is now a Scottish-links-style course offering golfers scenic views of the Elizabeth River and the Norfolk skyline.

Moving now to my third point: the critical role that community partnerships play in environmental sustainability:

SLIDE 21: The Norfolk Southern Corporation, with offices in Tokyo, is one of our nation's premier rail transportation companies. It serves every major container port in the eastern United States, and is North America's largest rail carrier of metals and automotive products. It has also become a national environmental leader, publishing its first sustainability report last year, and being named one of the top 100 corporations for environmental responsibility.

Why is this important? Railroads are the most energy-efficient way to move goods around the country, accounting for just 2 % of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions from transportation sources, and well under 1 % of greenhouse gas emissions from all sources.

SLIDE 22: Our Port, also with offices in Tokyo, is committed to stimulating the commerce of the Port of Virginia in an environmentally sensitive and sound manner. The Port has achieved ISO 14001:2004 certification for its Environmental Management System. It has been recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency for its purchase of three hybrid locomotives, and is expanding a two-year-old pilot program that provides low-cost financing to purchase or retro-fit diesel trucks with more emission-efficient engines.

SLIDE 23: Grassroots efforts are also helping preserve the environment, and they deserve our support. In Norfolk, the Elizabeth River Project is a non-profit organization dedicated to restoring the Elizabeth River. Since 1997, the Project's public/private partnerships have reduced pollution in the Elizabeth River by 204 million pounds, reduced, recycled or reused more than 1 billion pounds of products and materials and preserved and restored 992 acres of urban wildlife habitat - including wetlands.

SLIDE 24: The Elizabeth River Project is known throughout the Chesapeake Bay region and the nation as an example of how strong community and business partnerships and initiatives can make a meaningful difference.

Wetlands protection and restoration is critical to achieving a carbon-neutral society. Along with their potential as carbon sinks, wetlands are one of Earth's most biologically productive and diverse natural systems. Norfolk has successfully restored important areas of wetlands through the Elizabeth River Project, the citizen-led Lafayette Wetlands Partnership, and others.

SLIDE 25: Norfolk's actions to promote a low-carbon society take place within the larger context of Virginia's Energy Plan and the Governor's Climate Commission. SLIDE 26: Norfolk's Old Dominion University is playing a key part in this plan. ODU is a major research institution, and is the host school for the Virginia Coastal Energy Research Consortium.

Our area is rich in such alternative energy resources as wind, waves and algae, and ODU scientists will help decide whether Virginia's abundant supply of these should be tapped to generate electricity. They are also hard at work on a biodiesel research program that promises to produce alternative fuel from algae, reduce food crop demands for ethanol production and that can give wastewater a final scrubbing before being discharged by treatment plants into our rivers and bays.

SLIDE 27: U. S. Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill once said, "All politics is local." Today it can just as accurately be said "All environmental programs are local."

The world is becoming smaller and more connected, and decisions made in Norfolk, in Kitakyushu or in Tacoma on development, on transportation, on education or any number of other areas have ramifications for communities outside our immediate localities.

We salute the leadership shown by our sister city of Kitakyushu to protect our global ecosystem and seek a carbon-neutral society. Your commitment to making the world a better place to live, work and raise a family is plainly evident by your investment in the Eco-town Next-Generation Energy Park, by this symposium and other policies you have adopted. They are important steps in the right direction.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to share with you how the City of Norfolk is working in partnership with you to achieve a low-carbon society.