

# Red Light, Green Light

## Decision making with SAM, the Sustainable Action Map



A one page decision-making tool developed as a student project helps the City of Olympia, Washington make balanced, transparent decisions supporting increased sustainability, even when the issues involved have many ramifications. You're invited to try it.

by Amy Buckler

A sustainable community is one that persists over generations and is far-seeing enough, flexible enough and wise enough to maintain its natural, economic, social and political support systems.

This sustainability vision for the City of Olympia was created by a citizen taskforce in the early 1990s. In 2005, recognizing the need to reinvigorate the City's sustainability efforts with a focus on tangible action, the City Council adopted the goal of putting sustainability into action as one of its top long-term priorities.

The next year, a group of Department Directors, called the Sustainability Super Team, formed. The team recognized that sustainable action starts with balanced decision-making, and that the City needed a decision-making model to help assess the impacts of any decision on the community as a whole, as well as being easy for all departments to use.

To help develop this model, the City teamed up with the Evergreen State College. Six undergraduate students designed a sustainability decision model as part of a class project. The students named themselves STARS, or Students Toward Achieving Realistic Sustainability. After ten weeks of work, what emerged was the Sustainable Action Map.
























### About SAM

The Sustainable Action Map, lovingly referred to as SAM in the Olympia organization, provides a framework for approaching the community as a holistic system. Systems thinking is the foundation of sustainable decision making; it helps illuminate the relationships between social, environmental and economic issues. SAM ultimately helps the City deliver a level of service citizens expect, and do so in an

environmentally and socially responsible way, while ensuring the best economic conditions for the long-term.

SAM includes the following three dimensions, which work together to facilitate systems thinking:

- **N.I.C.E.** represents the four key components of sustainability: the *Natural*, the *Individual*, the *Community*, and the *Economy*. All four must be in balance to achieve a sustainable solution.

 <b>Sustainable Action Map (SAM)</b> Action: Provide pitchers of H2O & encourage use of reusable cups at City functions. Department: City-wide			
	Natural	Individual	
	How does this decision impact environmental health?	How does this decision directly impact the well-being of citizens and employees?	
<b>S</b>	<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer plastic bottles in waste stream.</li> <li>• Addresses climate change-a decision not to use a product that relies heavily on burning of fossil fuels during production &amp; transport.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always offering healthy water as an alternative to sugary beverages.</li> </ul>	<b>S</b>
<b>W</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At first (until everyone carries a cup), it will be necessary to provide paper cups-also an unnecessary waste of Earth's resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potentially, commonly used sinks contain more germs than individual water bottles (something to keep in mind in the event of a germ outbreak).</li> </ul>	<b>W</b>
<b>O</b>	<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To influence culture / change behavior harmful to the environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable action makes us feel good.</li> </ul>	<b>O</b>
<b>T</b>	<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using more paper cups when the only truly sustainable thing to do is use reusable cups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making bottled water taboo may discourage some employees from hydrating during the work day.</li> </ul>	<b>T</b>
			
			
			
			
			
			
			
			
			
			
			



# Sustainable Action Map (SAM)

Action: (PAC) Parking Fines, Citations and Rates

Department: Public Works

Leadership Required 

Manageable Risks 

Value Delivered 

**Natural:** How does this decision impact environmental health?

**S:** By increasing fees and fines to market rates, individuals will better understand the true cost of parking and will be more likely to consider alternatives to driving alone.

**W:** Higher rates might cause individuals to search for lower cost parking. This may cause individuals to drive their vehicles for a longer period of time searching for low cost parking.

**O:** Continue working with IT to find low cost alternatives to parking outside of the core and transporting individuals into downtown.

**T:**



**Individual:** How does this decision directly impact the well-being of citizens and employees?

**S:** Appropriate market costs for parking fees, citations and rates will ensure turnover in downtown and increase available parking for citizens and employees.

**W:** Higher parking costs will be absorbed by citizens, businesses and employees.

**O:** Businesses could help pay for patron parking through a token validation program.

**T:** Higher parking costs will have a financial impact on individuals (especially low income individuals).



**Community:** How does this decision impact relationships, effective government, social justice, and overall livability?

**S:** Appropriate market rates will ensure a more efficient use of existing parking stalls through increased turnover and less employee parking.

**W:** Higher parking rates will effect certain individuals (low income). This might be perceived as not taking their interests under consideration.

**O:** Conduct a educational campaign to inform citizens, businesses and employees of the changes and what individuals can do to find assistance. The feasibility of a new parking structure is also enhanced.

**T:** There could be a perception that all Parking Services is about is money and isn't taking the needs of the community under consideration.



**Economy:** How does this decision impact the local economy and what are its costs, both now and over the long-term?

**S:** Market Rates will place Parking Services in a stronger financial picture. Higher turnover of parking stalls will provide better availability of parking for new construction downtown.

**W:** Higher parking costs will be absorbed by citizens, businesses and employees.

**O:** The feasibility of a new parking structure is enhanced.

**T:** Higher parking costs might keep some individuals out of downtown Olympia or from utilizing Parking Services. This might have an effect on Parking Services budget as well as downtown businesses.



**SWOT: S=Strengths W=Weaknesses O=Opportunities T=Threats**



City of  
OLYMPIA

# Sustainable Action Map (SAM)

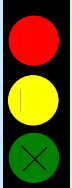

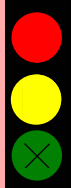
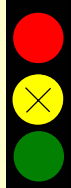
**Action:** Increase boot allowance for purchase of quality U.S. made boots

**Department:** Public Works and AFSME Unit

Leadership Required 

Manageable Risks 

Value Delivered 

<p><b>N</b>atural: How does this decision impact environmental health?</p> <p><b>S:</b> Boots are repairable - lost longer - less boots in landfill.</p> <p>Not Imported - less fuel - used to transport - less pollution.</p> <p><b>W:</b></p> <p><b>O:</b></p> <p><b>T:</b></p> 	<p><b>I</b>ndividual: How does this decision directly impact the well-being of citizens and employees?</p> <p><b>S:</b> Comfortable feet promotes quality work and safety.</p> <p><b>W:</b> Higher initial cost - benefits realized later.</p> <p><b>O:</b> Safety and health PPE and ergonomics lower sick days, fewer L&amp;I claims.</p> <p><b>T:</b></p> 	<p><b>C</b>ommunity: How does this decision impact relationships, effective government, social justice, and overall livability?</p> <p><b>S:</b> Promotes an ethic of non-disposability.</p> <p>Promotes safety and health.</p> <p>Promotes skilled craft.</p> <p><b>W:</b></p> <p><b>O:</b> Local repair shops will benefit.</p> <p><b>T:</b></p> 	<p><b>E</b>conomy: How does this decision impact the local economy and what are its costs, both now and over the long-term?</p> <p><b>S:</b> Many manufacturers in Northwest - White's, WESCO, Danner, Viberg, etc.</p> <p><b>W:</b> Higher initial cost - savings realized over a longer period of time.</p> <p><b>O:</b> Economic impact to local businesses, manufacturers, and repair persons.</p> <p><b>T:</b></p> 
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