

## Getting Green Together:

### An Interview with SMMA's Bob Hicks and Mark Zarrillo

Could the idea of shared sustainability initiatives help thaw the often chilly relations between universities and their host communities? On Friday March 20, Bob Hicks AIA, LEED AP and Mark Zarrillo FASLA, AICP of Symmes Maini & McKee Associates, along with Wellesley College's Peter Zuraw, will present a panel program called "Getting Green Together – Town/Gown Sustainability Planning" at the SCUP's 2009 Northeast Regional Conference in New York City.

We asked Hicks, a senior associate and project manager, and Zarrillo, a principal and campus master planner at SMMA, about their presentation and the big idea behind town-gown climate change collaboration.

**High Profile (HP):** How much cooperation are you seeing today between universities and local communities on green programs?

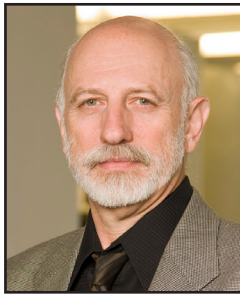
**Bob Hicks (BH):** Some communities are already working closely with university groups on sustainability actions, and some have yet to consider it. Overall, I would say we are beginning to see much more interest. It comes about when both parties realize there is a strong mutual interest in reducing greenhouse gasses. And since they all share the same resources and breathe the same air, it makes perfect sense to find ways to work together and achieve a broader impact.

**HP:** What are some of the ways the two can work together?

**Mark Zarrillo (MZ):** We believe there are several places where cooperation and a combined front will work. Recycling,



Hicks



Zarrillo

energy reduction, transportation and waste management are issues with large-scale impact on carbon reduction goals. Whether you represent a college or a municipality, the challenges and opportunities are similar. I know as a member of the Town of Brookline Planning Board, and its representative on the town's Climate Action Committee, that we are after the same outcome as the colleges – reducing energy costs and saving money. Getting there can be made easier by combining efforts.

**BH:** It's true. Just take one example reducing the collective carbon footprint, recycling. These days, the market for recycled materials is disappearing. Teaming up to find creative solutions can lead to new ways of addressing these problems. The University of Connecticut, for example, opens up a store once a month to sell off surplus furniture and equipment. The Storrs residents are their biggest customers, and the program is seen as a win-win. In other communities, the task of collecting appropriate data before any decisions can be made is a huge burden. Colleges can supply help in the form of student labor through internships or graduate research projects.

**HP:** What gets in the way of these shared initiatives?

**BH:** There is no established mechanism in most communities for working together beyond the usual boundaries. You have well-intentioned people on both sides, but too often there is no visible link or place to go to review the opportunities and goals together.

That's why we suggest as a first step that a climate action or sustainable action summit be arranged. At the outset, this can simply be a forum for each to learn about what the other is doing or attempting to do. The overlapping goals and the tasks to get there will quickly become clear, and the process of teamwork can start right away. We recommend that these meetings have a facilitator to help keep the discussion

and towns taking part, and 1,000 around the world. Among other things, this association provides technology tools and a practical protocol for local governments to follow as a benchmark. Many of the ICLEI tools can be applied in partnership with universities.

**HP:** How optimistic should we be that a shared approach will catch on anytime soon?

**MZ:** As universities implement green campus programs or conform to the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, they are seeing that they can only go just so far on their own. They are part of a larger community with overlapping issues and sustainable ideals. Some of the issues that Pete Zuraw has discussed with us are how Wellesley College, which has been operating a Co-generation facility for 10 or so years, interfaces with the town

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**–Mark Zarrillo  
principal and campus master planner at SMMA**

on track and to use an advance agenda to get the full benefit of a discussion.

**HP:** Is there a framework or a process already in existence that can help make teaming more successful?

**MZ:** There is an organization called ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, which is a global association of local governments committed to advancing climate protection and sustainable development. Currently, there are more than 500 US cities

of Wellesley and NSTAR.

**BH:** Mark's right about that. One thing we are all beginning to realize is that the financial resources for implementing any kind of community or campus improvement program are going to be scarce for the foreseeable future. So the rationale for getting together is greater than ever now. Why not broaden the vision and expand beyond your own green island?