



College of Urban and Public Affairs

Applying Triple Bottom Line Analysis to Development Decisions In the Portland Metro Region:

Findings and Implications of Focus Groups with Municipal and County Officials

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Abstract

Four focus groups were held with senior agency staff from municipal and county jurisdictions in the Portland metro region to explore *how, if at all, jurisdictions apply a triple bottom line (TBL) lens to development decisions and what might strengthen practice*. The research design, key findings, and recommended action steps are included in this report.

Few jurisdictions in the region take an integrated sustainability or triple bottom line approach to development decisions. Focus group participants expressed interest in and support for an integrated sustainability or triple bottom line approach to development decisions, while also identifying a number of barriers to doing so. Suggestions to support the application of an integrated sustainability or TBL lens to development were made, with implications for both Portland State University and Metro. Specific recommendations were made with respect to research, education, communication, and convening.

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Overview

As local jurisdictions turn their attention to sustainability issues, how does the concept's triple bottom line imperative of environmental, social, and economic health inform development decisions? To address this question, Portland State University's College of Urban and Public Affairs held four focus groups with senior agency staff from municipal and county jurisdictions in the Portland metro region to explore *how, if at all, jurisdictions apply a triple bottom line¹ (TBL) lens to development decisions and what might strengthen practice.*

This inquiry builds upon research conducted for the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy in which we examined cases where local or regional governments reviewed development decisions using a framework, tool, or process explicitly designed to account² for social, economic, and environmental impacts. As part of that effort we conducted interviews with staff from fourteen jurisdictions ranging in size from 55,000 to 1,000,000 in Australia, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. We found tools used for a variety of purposes including rating and ranking among a portfolio of potential projects (e.g., bridge, library, or flood control), deciding among alternatives (e.g., three options to address flood mitigation), or improving design of a designated project (e.g., identify potential impacts and options to mitigate if negative and amplify if positive). Tools are applied at multiple scales (e.g., single parcel, neighborhood, district, city, region) and vary in complexity, amount of expertise and resources required, amount and type of community participation, use of qualitative or quantitative data, and the level of integration of the three dimensions of sustainability.

This research effort is designed to improve understanding regarding how best to support achievement of regional sustainability goals. We would like to offer our sincere gratitude to the municipal officials who so generously shared their time and insights. We would also like to be clear that identified areas for improvement should not be taken as a critique of individuals, departments, or jurisdictions.

In this report we provide a review of the research process, followed by a discussion of current practice, key themes identified, and recommended action steps. It is our hope that this report is useful to the design and implementation of programs that support local and regional officials in their efforts to account for triple bottom line impacts of development decisions.

¹ John Elkington, an international business consultant, coined the term in the 1994 to describe the extra-financial impacts of investment: "In the simplest terms, the TBL agenda focuses corporations not just on the economic value that they add, but also on the environmental and social value that they add – or destroy" (Elkington, 2004, p.3).

² When we speak here of "accounting for the triple bottom line," we refer to the broader concept of accountability, assessment, and evaluation rather than a more narrow system of financial accounting. The terms framework, tool, and process are used interchangeably in the literature.

Research Design

Four focus group sessions were held, each targeted toward a specific development domain: land use planning and review, economic development, environmental services, and transportation.³ The format, described below, was the same for each session. The purpose of the sessions was to better understand: 1) Are triple bottom line goals of environmental, social, and economic health considered by local jurisdictions when designing, choosing, or evaluating development projects and, if so, how? 2) Are current approaches working well or not and why? 3) What might strengthen practice and what implications might there be for education and training efforts?

Invitations to each of the four focus group sessions were sent to staff of the four Portland metro region counties⁴ as well as the twelve jurisdictions in those counties with a population greater than 20,000 (sixteen jurisdictions total, sixty-four contacts). Invitations were sent to the appropriate agency lead as identified on the jurisdiction's official website.⁵ Where a person was the lead contact for more than one development domain (e.g., the Public Works Director is in charge of both transportation and environmental services), the invitee was encouraged to select the session that best fit her or his interests or schedule and, if appropriate, send an alternate staff person to the session they did not attend.

Each session had six to eight jurisdictions represented, which was within our goal of five to eight participants per session. In total, eleven jurisdictions were represented (three of the four counties and eight of the twelve municipalities). Municipalities represented range in population from 21,00 to 576,000 and counties represented range in population from 234,000 to 718,000 (Appendix One). The focus group sessions were two hours in length and were led by the Principal Investigator, Dr. Janet Hammer. Participating co-investigators included Dr. Ellen Bassett in the land use session, Dr. Barry Messer in the environmental services session, and John MacArthur in the transportation session.

The sessions began with a brief overview of the genesis of the research, introductions, and "housekeeping details" (e.g., timeframe, research rights and consent, breaks). To ensure that everyone was on the same page, key terms were defined (e.g., sustainability, TBL) and sample TBL frameworks were introduced. The TBL frameworks were reviewed with the clarification that the tools were not being endorsed or recommended but were offered as

³ In focus group research it is common to organize sessions that are homogeneous across a certain characteristic (e.g., stay-at-home parents and parents working outside the home) in order to identify whether themes emerge that are unique to specific populations. In this research, we were interested in understanding not just whether jurisdictions take a TBL approach but whether that may vary depending upon the type of agency.

⁴ Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties in Oregon and Clark County, Washington.

⁵ The search for appropriate agency contacts was an informative process in its own right: Municipalities vary greatly in the transparency, ease of navigation, responsiveness, and access they provide.

illustrations of the range of TBL approaches seen at the local and regional level (Appendix Two). Next, participants discussed whether their jurisdiction has applied a TBL lens to development decisions, what has worked well or not (or if such a lens had not been applied why that was the case and what might facilitate uptake), and implications for education and training. Each session was focused, by virtue of the participants, on a specific development domain; however, participants were not dissuaded from speaking about TBL application to other domains in their jurisdiction (e.g., a participant in the environmental services focus group might note that the comprehensive plan was recently rewritten with a sustainability focus). The sessions were recorded and transcribed, and data analyzed. The remainder of this report discusses current applications, key issues, recommendations, and suggested next steps.

Current Practice

Few of the participating jurisdictions currently apply an explicit TBL or integrated sustainability approach to their development decisions.⁶ One exception is the City of Lake Oswego, where a sustainability matrix has been used to help inform capital improvement decisions.⁷ Two approaches from entities not included in the focus groups were identified during the discussions and personal communications were made as a follow-up: the Tualatin Valley Water District uses a TBL matrix to inform capital improvement decisions and Airport Futures, a long-range development plan for Portland International Airport, used a sustainability framework to inform the design and selection of options. In our web search and focus groups we did not identify any additional jurisdictions in the region that apply an explicit TBL lens to development decisions.⁸ Participants in the transportation focus group suggested that Oregon's state-mandated Transportation System Plans (TSP) address all three bottom lines, as do Environmental Impact Analyses when they are required. The group also noted that Metro applies a good deal of triple bottom line thinking to its transportation planning and decision-making.

Many of the participating jurisdictions have sustainability efforts such as policies, plans, projects, or coordinators. While these sustainability efforts are recognized and applauded, it is important to note where there is room for improvement. First, most of the region's sustainability efforts focus on "green" or natural resource dimensions rather than the three integrated dimensions of environment, society, and economy. The environmental component is critically important; however, sustainability efforts, by definition, should address three integrated dimensions. Second, few jurisdictions implement their sustainability efforts in a coordinated or holistic manner, nor have a visible mechanism to

⁶ This research considers whether jurisdictions take a TBL approach to development review and their self-report of what is working well or not. Our current scope does not include an evaluation or endorsement of extant review systems.

⁷ The City also expects to apply a screening or decision tool to evaluate and prioritize policies and projects for the comprehensive plan update.

⁸ We recognize that additional jurisdictions may be applying such a lens but were not identified in our survey. We welcome feedback regarding additional cases.

track progress and inform future efforts over time. As Gresham's *Sustainability Policy Implementation Update* states, "What's missing? Sustainable Gresham Plan to guide the budgeting, development, and performance measurement of future projects as well as improvements to ongoing operations."⁹

What's Influencing the Use of TBL Approaches

Given that few jurisdictions represented in the focus groups have applied TBL tools to development decisions, the conversations centered more on what influences TBL uptake rather than on what is working well or not when using TBL tools. While distinct focal points of conversation surfaced in each session, key themes regarding the application of an integrated sustainability or TBL lens to development decisions emerged across the sessions. Discussed below, these include: capacity, short term financial bottom line priorities, the prevalence of and problems associated with working in silos, leadership gaps, context sensitivity, and communication challenges.

Capacity

Focus group participants expressed interest in and support for TBL analysis while also articulating a number of resource-related and knowledge-related capacity barriers to its application. Resource-related gaps pertain to the interrelated issues of time, staff, and budget (we don't have the time, labor, or budget to make this happen). Knowledge-related gaps pertain to sustainability issues in general (what does sustainability mean), familiarity with sustainability or TBL accounting frameworks (what tools are available and how do we use them), and data availability (where do we get the information).

With respect to knowledge, participants noted that both practitioners and policymakers are still learning what sustainability means. One participant suggested that conversations about sustainability are often like the Gary Larson Far Side cartoon where a dog's owner is speaking but the dog only hears "blah blah Ginger, blah blah." Another participant observed, "If people don't generally know what sustainability is they are not necessarily going to propose projects that score well." Further, sustainability can mean different things to different people, leading to varying interpretations of what the issues and potential solutions may be. Participants also expressed concern about a general lack of understanding regarding how various dimensions of the triple bottom line are related. Said one municipal employee, "It is a struggle to get agencies and the community to see the whole, to see connections versus one piece."

Social dimensions were identified as the least understood and attended to aspect of sustainability. Though some social dimensions are fairly common and uncontroversial

⁹ City of Gresham. 2009. Sustainability Policy Implementation Update, P. 49
<http://greshamoregon.gov/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=16110>.

(e.g., health, safety, mobility, jobs, housing, culture, participation), others such as equity are more difficult to talk about and agree upon. Also, successful engagement of non-traditional populations has been a challenge. Said one official, “We’re light years behind on the social side.”

Lack of data also poses a challenge to meaningful discussion of potential impacts. One information challenge pertains to the need for baseline and longitudinal information that often does not exist or is not readily available. Another challenge is the need for cost and saving estimates to use when calculating a project’s potential impacts. A third challenge pertains to interpretation of data (e.g., “I get a number but how do I know if it is a good or bad number?). Information gaps were identified regarding valuation of non-monetized impacts, life cycle costs, indirect and cumulative impacts, greenhouse gas emissions (baseline information and calculators), and uncertainty associated with complex systems and long time horizons (e.g., peak oil or climate change assumptions).

Even when data are available, the time and budget required to conduct analyses may be beyond the capacity of the organization. Referring to the “return on accountability,” participants felt that sometimes it is not worthwhile to spend resources trying to account for a project’s impacts. At the same time, it was noted that the cumulative effect of many small decisions can be quite large, which pointed to the need for assessment of the larger plan and system – an issue addressed in the section on silos below.

Concerns were also expressed regarding private sector capacity to comply with TBL directives, particularly in a down economy. Many participants expressed fear that adding time and cost layers to the private sector will chase business away. Said one participant, “it’s hard to balance good public policy with what the market will bear.” There is a sense that developers may need assistance in meeting TBL goals. For example, if a TBL review prioritizes projects that source local material or have involvement by minority, women, emerging, and small businesses then the jurisdiction or supporting partner may need to help applicants make that happen. Said one participant, “if you are going to require something, then offer something that helps them get to the goal you have set or the requirement you’ve imposed.”

Short Term Financial Bottom Line

Participants suggest that the short-term financial bottom line frequently trumps other bottom lines in both the public and private sectors. Observed one participant, “if it costs more up front, Council is not interested. Even if there are savings in the long run.” Said another, “Often there’s this sort of a long-term payout that’s really hard to sell; it’s about stopping the bleeding now.”

As noted above, there is great reluctance to incorporate any requirements that may “chase business away.” In general, participants feel “we can only do it [push for triple bottom line accountability] if it makes bottom line sense to the private sector and if it is going to

cost, we will need to provide a subsidy.” Also, the desire for job creation supersedes other interests, including full costs or life cycle costs. Said one participant, “We’re responsive to opportunities and we’re certainly not going to turn away a firm that has a large carbon footprint.”

Silos versus Integrated Systems

A number of “silo” related issues surfaced during the focus groups. These include a lack of integration among the three dimensions of sustainability, as well as within and between departments, organizations, and neighboring jurisdictions, and across various stages and scales of the development process. Commented one participant, “The reason we have the issues that we have is because [a system approach] is what we haven’t gotten. And now to fix it, that’s what we’re going to have to get.”

In general, there is a lack of connection between jurisdictions’ assessment of development and their visions and goals. In some jurisdictions, sustainability visions or goals have been defined but the potential impact on these goals is not considered during the development decision process. In other jurisdictions, sustainability goals simply have not been defined. This is a problem because, as one agency official commented, “you can’t start evaluating or measuring before you know what it is you are trying to get to.” Of course, the value of connecting TBL development assessment to goal achievement depends upon the quality of the goals and measures defined – a matter related to the capacity discussion above.

With respect to integration across stages of the development process, participants discussed the need to apply a TBL lens early on, when the concept and design of a project can be influenced, rather than downstream during proposal review when there is little room to shape the project. This suggestion includes the need for multidisciplinary and multiagency collaboration early in the process and in a more synchronized fashion. For example, an integrated approach to “pavement and pipe” infrastructure would look for ways to yield environmental, community-building and stewardship benefits, as well as savings to rate payers. Commented one participant, “it can be a road or it can be a green connector that is comfortable for walking, provides bird habitat, and other things.” Noted another, “It’s about bringing in the multiple disciplines at the beginning, and they work together.” This includes doing a better job of coordinating “planners and implementers” to better understand and respond to each other’s perspective.

The importance of regional coordination was also discussed, along with the challenges of doing so. One issue is the frequent disconnect between incremental project reviews and cumulative, system-wide impacts. Noted one participant, “So that’s where the conundrum happens, is how do you achieve system goals? At the project level how do you ensure that you’re feeding back up into those larger goals and what do you need to help you do that?” Specific areas of coordination discussed include housing, transportation, and economic development. Related to this is the issue that jurisdictions in the region compete with each other (e.g., trying to recruit business), yet the region as a

whole needs to better coordinate in order to be competitive with other regions. Observed one participant, “In a large metro region like this, we really function as this single economic entity when we’re competing everywhere else, but yet we have so many geo-political boundaries and policies that the coordination is a challenge.” Questions were raised as to how Metro and groups like Regional Partners can facilitate targeting of investment and recruitment in a way that local jurisdictions don’t feel they have lost power or control.

Leadership

When discussing whether and how a TBL lens may be applied to assessment of development decisions, one participant observed, “we can’t get beyond where the electeds are on anything.” Municipal officials participating in the focus groups suggested that many of their leaders do not have a solid grasp of, or commitment to, these issues. Said one participant “I don’t hear about any of this stuff from our commissioners ... it starts with the leadership.” Related to the capacity issues and short-term imperatives identified earlier, one municipal employee noted that in some jurisdictions “our top leadership is not interested in investing in long term valuable solutions. We are stuck in the reactive mode of wanting to instantly gratify city councilors.”

Participants offered specific strategies to address leadership gaps. They noted that peer-learning events have been effective for providing exposure to a topic and building support for moving forward. For example, bringing peers from various jurisdictions together for a presentation and discussion of best practices or models can be helpful, as can tours to learn about how things work in other places. Participants were clear about the importance of a neutral convener for these learning events, and the value of mixing with peers from across the region.

Context

Participants expressed concern about sensitivity to context in their discussion of TBL applications to development decisions. One context related issue is the need for assessment tools that accommodate differences in type and size of project, as well as functional class (e.g., performance for an arterial street versus local street). Participants also noted the importance of being able to respond to the uniqueness of a situation, pointing out that what works in one area may not be appropriate in another. For example, jurisdictions differ with respect to relevance of issues, support for various approaches, and what pencils out. Related to this, participants raised questions regarding when and how to apply a TBL lens to development decisions identifying both instances when a finer product and better decision was made as a result of an extensive and deliberate process, as well as instances when the “return on accountability” seemed low.

Another context issue raised relates to the important role of code in shaping development projects. Participants shared experiences with codes that prohibit TBL strategies from

being implemented, codes that were never implemented, and codes that quickly became obsolete.

The application of TBL frameworks to development decisions can be facilitated by strong incentives or disincentives (e.g., required in order to be eligible for funding), though participants expressed caution regarding the use of mandates. Applying a TBL lens to municipal investments is viewed as less of a stretch as “it’s just sort of inherent in the responsibility in the government to have this multiple purpose, multiple value to service, as opposed to what’s in the business sector in terms of maximizing profits.” However, as noted above, here too there is often an emphasis on short-term finances rather than whole system or life cycle costs. Applying a TBL lens in the context of private sector development is viewed as more problematic. Consistent with the discussion on “chasing business away,” jurisdictions are thought to have more latitude to incorporate TBL requirements into requests for proposals than into day-to-day development review (i.e., “if we want to compete on this bid we must do this” versus “this jurisdiction has too many requirements, let’s go somewhere else”).

Communication Matters

A final theme that emerged in discussions about the application of a triple bottom line lens to development decisions is the notion that framing and communication matters a great deal. Participants were clear that receptivity to the application of a TBL lens is very much a function of effective framing and messaging. For example, the language of “sustainability” resonates in some communities, while in others it is more effective to speak about efficiency, performance, quality of life, health, best practices, the triple bottom line, or something else.

While the language of sustainability and the triple bottom line is somewhat contested, the concepts embedded in those terms are clearly seen as essential functions of government. As one participant said, “in so far as sustainability means a good quality of life for residents now and the ability to have a high quality of life in the future then the essential product of the city is sustainability. I mean, that’s our goal as local governments – to ensure that the people who live there have a good quality of life now and that they will in the future.”

Beyond the challenge of finding appropriate language to discuss sustainability or the triple bottom line, it can also be challenging to communicate the value proposition of a TBL approach. Related to capacity issues discussed earlier, information regarding benefits to the financial bottom line (e.g., cost savings) or other bottom lines (e.g., better health outcomes) often is not readily available. Further, some elements, such as diversity and equity, are seen as difficult to talk about.

Participants also discussed the need for deliberative processes that effectively engage diverse community members and provide for informed consensus on decisions. One

example provided was the recent Airport Futures process that used a decision-making process that was very educational and supportive of consensus.

Helping Jurisdictions Apply a TBL Lens to Development Decisions

Three main themes emerged from the focus groups regarding what would help jurisdictions apply a TBL lens to development decisions. Participants' recommendations centered on building understanding of triple bottom line concepts, supporting the development and implementation of TBL review tools, and encouraging integrated sustainability approaches across the development process. The importance of including special districts in these efforts as appropriate was noted, as they play a significant role in development as well.

Building Understanding of TBL Concepts

Meaningfully incorporation of a TBL lens into development decisions is predicated on greater understanding of the concept. Recommendations in this arena include convening informal educational opportunities, incorporating integrated sustainability into curricula, and finding more effective ways to communicate about the subject.

With respect to informal educational opportunities, participants were enthusiastic about the effectiveness of peer settings such as a small group session of key leaders or a book group at the workplace.¹⁰ Participants favor settings that encourage dialogue and exchange, and stressed the importance of identifying the right convener for the situation (e.g., a neutral convener like PSU in some settings or a peer leader in others). Meeting with peers from other jurisdictions was suggested as valuable not only for sharing information but for building relationships that are important for collaboration.

With respect to formal curricula, participants suggest that content should address systems thinking as well how to apply a TBL or integrated sustainability approach to decision-making on the ground. They want to ensure that students have an understanding of "the impacts of what we've done in the past." Said one participant, "They need that kind of exposure... I want them to have that broader perspective of it's not all about the engineering design, it's about the world, the environment, the climate, and have them have that appreciation." Said another, "It's about systems and holistic kinds of things and the reasons we have the issues that we have." There is also interest in ensuring that students are equipped for integrated decision-making: "how to put all these different competing interests together and weigh them somehow." Other topics suggested as important for students include framing, equity issues, and project implementation including funding of development processes.

¹⁰ Example books offered included *Health and Community Design: The Impact of the Built Environment on Physical Activity* (Frank, Engelke, & Schmid, 2003) and *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (Reisner, 1986).

With respect to effective communication about TBL related issues, said one participant, “Can we get information out so people can understand it?” Specific topics participants are struggling with include affordable housing as a workforce or aging in place issue, health as a frame for land use and transportation discussions, infrastructure as the foundation for community. There is a lot of interest in messaging about the value proposition of a TBL approach; for example, how this helps my business or what public benefit will occur. The issue of calculating value proposition is addressed below.

There is also a sense that the power of example would help to foster more integrated sustainability approaches. Said one participant, “I always think people are attracted to movement and also cool ideas.” The power of example applies both to processes (e.g., a framework that worked well) and projects (e.g., demonstrating what the principles look like in real life, how to make it happen, and lessons learned).

Supporting Development and Implementation of TBL Review Tools

Focus group participants indicated that many jurisdictions do not have the capacity to develop TBL review tools on their own, nor is it efficient for them to do so. Said one participant, “it’s crazy for us to be doing all of this so separately when there are some resources that could help us.” In general, there is limited knowledge of available tools and how to use them, and data required to account for impact may be unavailable or difficult to obtain. The focus groups themselves may have supported learning objectives. Said one participant, “I think you’ve done a great first step in giving examples and ways of doing it, I think this is very helpful, I’m certainly going to take this back.”

There is interest in tools to compare projects, better data to demonstrate impact or value proposition (e.g., what are the savings), relative impacts and strategic points of intervention (e.g., pie chart showing green house gas contributors helps you know where to focus), and guidance in interpreting what a number means (e.g., implications). It was also noted that a triple bottom line lens can be incorporated into comprehensive plans, and that periodic review provides a good opportunity to do so.

Caution was provided regarding the complexity of tools. A number of participants expressed interest in tools that are user-friendly, simple, and are not labor intensive or costly. Caution was also expressed regarding the use of models, with two incidents recounted where a lower impact, more sustainable option was identified only after the forecast model initially applied was questioned and found to have shortcomings.

Metro, PSU, and other institutes of higher education were specifically mentioned as entities that logically could assist with the development and implementation of TBL tools. For example, “It strikes me that that’s something Metro could provide that would be really useful is those kind of simple models that we could apply and start trying to at least make a stab... it gives you, it ranks projects and that would be helpful.” Assistance with

development and implementation includes making examples, data and resources easily accessible, providing training regarding TBL assessment, connecting jurisdictions so they can learn from each other, and integrating TBL assessment content into curriculum.

Encouraging Integrated Sustainability Approaches to Development

Participants identified three strategies for encouraging more integrated sustainability approaches to development that complement the recommendations regarding improved understanding of TBL concepts and implementation of TBL assessment tools. The three additional strategies pertain to interdisciplinary and multi-sector collaboration, incentives, and programmatic support.

Participants suggest that integrated sustainability approaches are fostered when diverse parties are brought together early in the development process (e.g., multi-discipline, multi-sector, multi-agency). This includes involving people “in the trenches” in problem-solving and decision-making and focusing on achieving goals rather than meeting standards. Said one participant, “If you can start the dialogue early on... then you have an opportunity.” This strategy is thought to yield better understanding of the development situation and encourage creativity and synergy that leads to more effective solutions.

The question of whether to incentivize or require TBL approaches to development was the subject of substantial discussion. As noted earlier, there are concerns about requirements or mandates pushing development away, coupled with a recognition that context influences what type of requests can be made and when. For example, jurisdictions have much more leverage when issuing a request for proposals (RFP) for a project than when one jurisdiction is competing against another to attract a development. Also, what is considered industry standard or what “pencils out” varies across the region. Again, periodic review was mentioned as a place where TBL principles can be infused into the development landscape. There is a sense that Metro has begun to infuse a triple bottom line into funding allocations and other decisions and that doing so can be appropriate. At the same time, concerns were expressed about a “heavy hand.” Noted one participant, “I think Metro has improved their approach in terms of communicating with all the jurisdictions about all of these things but I think what we’re all saying is you know, having Metro come and tell us what to do is not really that effective.”

Fostering integrated approaches to sustainability requires specific attention to social dimensions of sustainability, particularly with respect to equity and opportunity. As noted earlier, education and outreach to build understanding and skill with respect to integrated sustainability is required. In addition, participants suggested that programming efforts may be needed in order to help the development community meet social bottom line goals. This includes, for example, public-private partnerships that help defray extra project costs or support of efforts to expand contracts and hiring of minority, women, and emerging small businesses.

Conclusions and Implications

This report provides insight to the questions of whether and how integrated sustainability or triple bottom line analysis is being applied to development decisions in the region, and what might strengthen practice. Few jurisdictions in the region currently apply a triple bottom line lens to the design, evaluation, or selection of development projects. Focus group participants expressed interest in and support for the application of such an approach, though their capacity to do so is constrained.

The issues and recommendations identified in the focus groups can be understood within an “ecology of change” framework. That is, they address awareness (do I know about this issue), salience (is it relevant, do I care), locus of control (do I think I can do anything about it), efficacy (do I feel competent to do something about it), and motivation (do I want to do something, are there incentives or disincentives).

When discussing how best to strengthen practice regarding an integrated sustainability approach to development decisions, participants specifically mentioned Portland State University and Metro as having an important role to play. The participant’s recommendations provide opportunities both to strengthen existing activities as well as implement new programs. A brief summary of suggested next steps includes:

- Make examples and resources easily accessible
Research and disseminate examples, best practices, and tools. Develop user-friendly tools as appropriate and provide training on how to use them.
- Communicate the value proposition
Help jurisdictions craft and deliver messages that effectively communicate the meaning and value of triple bottom line development approaches. Collect and make available data that documents impacts, benefits, and costs of various approaches.
- Convene learning events
Host events for practitioners and policymakers to learn more about the principles and practices of triple bottom line development decisions. Foster safe, neutral spaces for peer exchange.
- Enhance degree and continuing education programs
Where appropriate, modify existing courses to address "integrated" sustainability assessment and consider offering a course specifically focused on the subject. Provide training and continuing education opportunities regarding TBL approaches to development decisions.

- ❑ Create spaces for integrated approaches early in the development process
Bring diverse sectors, disciplines, and organizations together to collaboratively explore ways to maximize triple bottom line benefit when considering or designing a project. Facilitate better engagement with populations that are traditionally under-represented.
- ❑ Integrate TBL decision-making with planning, investment and indicator initiatives
Community visions, goals, and indicators can provide a platform for evaluating development decisions. An integrated sustainability or TBL lens should be incorporated into those efforts and attention given to how they can be used to assist with development decisions.

The key themes identified in our focus groups with municipal and county officials are consistent with prior research for the Lincoln Institute on the use of TBL approaches used by local and regional jurisdictions, our focus groups regarding application of a social bottom line framework to development¹¹, and literature regarding uptake and performance of sustainability assessment (see Appendix Three).

Suggested next steps include a range of research, education, communication, and convening activities that align with the mission and capabilities of PSU and Metro and would support the application of an integrated sustainability (TBL) lens to development decisions in the region. The focus group results affirm the direction of a number of strategies that are underway or being discussed and indicate where efforts may best be focused in the future both by PSU and Metro, as well as other organizations in the region.

¹¹ Four focus groups were held with certifiers, planners, financiers, and developers to review our draft Social Bottom Line Framework and consider how best to build on that effort to advance thinking and practice in the region.

Appendix One: Participating Jurisdictions

The author of this report is solely responsible for its content. We would like to thank the following focus group participants for sharing their valuable time and insights.

Land Use Planning and Review

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|---|------------------|
| Mike Abbate, Urban Design and Planning Director | Gresham |
| Stephen Sparks, Planning Division Manager | Beaverton |
| Chuck Beasley, Senior Planner | Multnomah |
| Gordon Euler, Long Range Planning Manager | Clark County |
| Cam Gilmour, Director Dept. of Transportation and Development | Clackamas County |
| Jonna Papaefthimiou, Natural Resource Planner | Lake Oswego |
| Dan Drentlaw, Economic Development Manager | Oregon City |
| Katie Mangle, Planning Director | Milwaukie |

Environmental Services

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Guy Graham, Public Works Director/City Engineer | Lake Oswego |
| Paul Shirley, Operations Director Public Works | Milwaukie |
| Nancy Kraushaar, Public Works Director/City Engineer | Oregon City |
| Dave Rouse, Director Environmental Services | Gresham |
| Anne Nelson, Environmental Program Coordinator | Portland |
| Ron Wierenga, Clean Water Program Manager | Clark County |
| Jennifer Snyder | Clackamas County |

Economic Development

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|--|------------------|
| Gary Barth, Director Business and Community Services | Clackamas County |
| Jane Blackstone, Economic Development Manager | Lake Oswego |
| Alexander Campbell, Resource & Economic Development Specialist | Milwaukie |
| Alice Rouyer, Executive Director Redevelopment Commission | Gresham |
| Jeffrey King, Economic Development Coordinator | Forest Grove |
| John Southgate, Director of Economic Development | Hillsboro |
| Sara King, Neighborhood Manager | Portland |
| Sean Farrelly, Redevelopment Project Manager | Tigard |

Transportation

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Mike Bezner, Transportation Engineering Manager | Clackamas |
| Erica Rooney, Assistant City Engineer | Lake Oswego |
| Kenny Asher, Director of Community Development & Public Works | Milwaukie |
| Steve Shulte, Transportation Division Manager | Clark County |
| Jane McFarland, Principal Land Use and Transportation Planner | Multnomah County |
| Katherine Kelly, Transportation Planning Manager | Gresham |

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Appendix Two: Types of TBL Analysis

A Triple Bottom Line or integrated sustainability lens can be applied to a range of scales and a variety of purposes. TBL frameworks may be applied at the building, parcel, project, neighborhood/district, city, region, or country scale. They may be used to understand, predict, design, choose, approve, monitor, or evaluate.

Examples of TBL approaches to development decision-making include the following:¹²

- Review of development applications in Brighton & Hove, UK and Port Coquitlam, Canada
- Evaluate economic development incentive applications in Austin, Texas (with independent third-party verification required prior to disbursement of payment)
- Inform selection of capital improvement projects in Austin, Texas; Calgary, Canada; King County, Washington; Lake Oswego, Oregon; Seattle Public Utility, Washington; and the Tualatin Valley Water District in Oregon
- Define and review requests for proposals (RFP) for development project in Victoria and Port Coquitlam, Canada
- Review and select regional growth options in Hamilton, Canada
- Inform the design, implementation, and delivery of development agency projects in Victoria, Australia, and the UK (Southeast Economic Development Agency and West Midland Redevelopment Agency)
- Inform and improve public works decisions in Olympia, Washington
- Assess the impact of urban development plans and projects in San Francisco.

¹² These examples illustrate types of approaches to TBL review. Their inclusion does not imply an endorsement of specific tools or techniques.

Appendix Three: Related Literature

The literature pertaining to integrated sustainability assessment is extensive. The articles listed here focus on integrated sustainability frameworks and their use, and were selected for their relevance to this research.

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Hammer, J., Allen, J. & Meier, B. (2010). *Accounting for development: Assessing social and triple bottom line returns of public development investment*. Working Paper prepared for the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute.

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Jensen, J. & Elle, M. (2007). Exploring the use of tools for urban sustainability in European Cities. *Indoor and Built Environment*, 16(3): 235-247.

Jones, P. & Patterson, J. (2006). The development of a practical evaluation tool for urban sustainability. *Indoor and Built Environment*, 16(3): 255-272.

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