



2011 Early Adopter: Ecolibrium3

Executive Summary

**Note: This case study was formed in partnership with University of Minnesota Duluth and was written and investigated by students of the Sustainable Management class.*

Ecolibrium3 was founded in July of 2011 as a non-profit organization. It is a community-based energy agency that offers a “one-stop-shop” for information about household energy improvements, low-interest financing, and access to rebates, grants and other incentives for homeowners of all income levels. They work in coordination with other community housing and energy organizations. The company’s name of Ecolibrium3 comes from “ecolibrum,” which refers to environment and economic balance, and “3,” which signifies the triple bottom line, a term used to describe sustainability. Ecolibrium3 offers a variety of services that are designed to improve the energy efficiency of their client’s homes. They provide free home energy ratings, free personalized home energy consultations, free personalized financial energy package (rebates and low interest loans), and free workshops. Ecolibrium3’s main clients are homeowners of all incomes who are interested in living in a more environmentally friendly manner. They serve approximately 450 homeowners per year around the Duluth area. The mission of Ecolibrium3 is “To assist individuals, businesses, and communities in creating balanced environmental and economic solutions for a sustainable future.” The entire Ecolibrium 3 organization is focused on creating change in the Duluth community via educating homeowners about the benefits of being energy efficient and sustainably minded. Therefore, Ecolibrium3 felt that participating in Sustainable Twin Ports’ sustainability training program would be a good way to stay true to their mission.

Actions taken include:

Operationally use composting as a natural process of recycling organic material into the soil

Print on both sides of the paper to save costs of paper and reduce the waste of trees

Have a sustainability challenge at home and work

Recovered heat from the server room in office building

Implemented a garden exchange program

Became host of the “Living Green by the Lake” Expo held in Duluth, MN

“It [sustainability] happens in waves, and it takes time to get everyone on the same page. When people are more energized about sustainability, things can get done quicker.”



About Sustainable Twin Ports (STP) and the Early Adopter Program

[Sustainable Twin Ports](#) is a 501c-3 non-profit dedicated to furthering economic, environmental & social sustainability in the Twin Ports and western Lake Superior region through education, networking and action. Our pilot training program, the Early Adopter Project was focused on training businesses, organizations and municipalities in environmentally, economically and socially sustainable practices. This has evolved into a yearly training program with local businesses and organizations that we call Early Adopters.

About The Natural Step (TNS)

[The Natural Step](#) is a global not-for-profit organization with a simple mission: to promote real change toward a sustainable world. The Natural Step supports a strategic framework that is a proven, scientifically robust approach that helps organizations make strategic decisions to move toward sustainability. Sustainable Twin Ports uses the Natural Step Framework as a basis for our sustainability training.

The Natural Step bases its training on four sustainability principles;

Four Sustainability Principles

In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing...

1. **...Concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust** (*e.g., fossil fuels, dispersed metals, etc.*)
2. **...Concentrations of substances produced by society** (*e.g., dispersed pesticides, persistent chemicals from our manufacturing processes and our products, etc.*)
3. **...Degradation by physical means** (*e.g., paving wetlands; deforestation; overharvesting fish; agricultural and forestry practices that result in the loss of soil, soil ecosystems and valuable nutrients; urban sprawl; loss of diversity through monoculture; etc.*)

and, in that society...

... people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs (*e.g., lack of access to education, poor wages, time pressure from our jobs or spent in traffic rather than with our families, etc.*)

Ecolibrium3 Sustainability Case Study



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Joel Henkel

Brett Podein

Travis Thompson

Bridget Witschen

Tim Wold

History & Description

Ecolibrium3 was founded in July of 2011 as a non-profit organization. Ecolibrium3 received \$1.5 million in stimulus funding to start DEEP (Duluth Energy Efficiency Program), the program they developed.

- “We are a community-based energy agency that offers a ‘One-Stop-Shop’ for information about household energy improvements, low-interest financing, access to rebates, grants and other incentives for homeowners of all income levels. We work in coordination with other community housing and energy organizations.”



The company is a spinoff of Common Ground Construction, LLC based in Duluth, MN which is a company that rehabilitates homes into green affordable housing units. The company’s name of Ecolibrium3 comes from “ecolibrum” which refers to environment and economic balance and “3” which signifies the triple bottom line.

Services:

Ecolibrium3 offers a variety of services that are designed to improve the energy efficiency of their client’s homes.

Free Home Energy Ratings

Free Personalized Home Energy Consultations

- Home Performance Energy Audits with Blower Door and Infrared Building Diagnostics
- Customized Action Plans - develop a scope of work that prioritizes the cost-effective energy improvements
- Targets air sealing, insulation, HVAC upgrades, health and safety, appliances, lighting
- Quality Assurance—Post Improvement Inspections

Free Personalized Financial Energy Package (Rebates and Low Interest Loans)

- Access to Free and Low Cost Money to Help Homeowners Complete Home Energy Improvements.
- Access to Trained and Certified Contractors

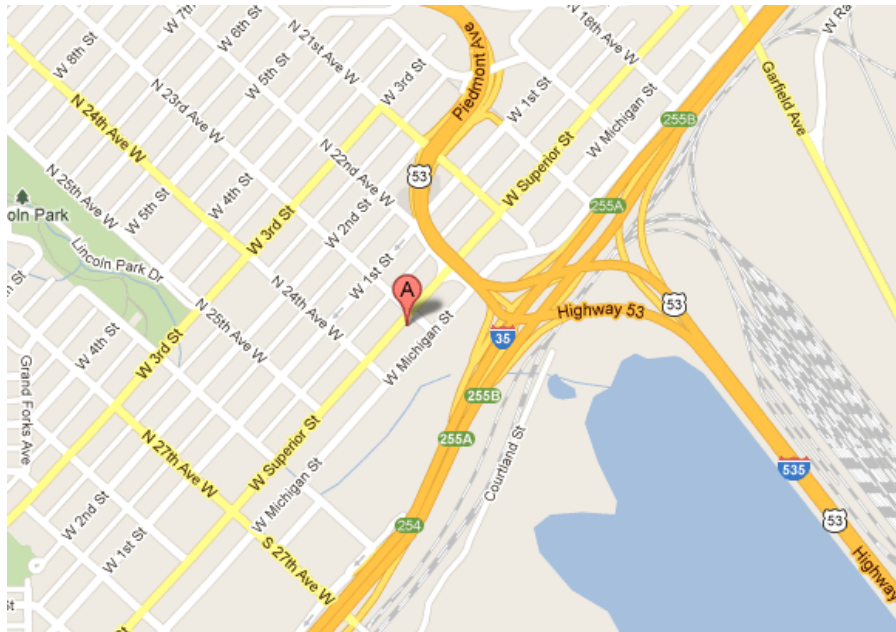
- Measurable Results—Quantified Energy Savings
- Emission Reductions

Free Workshops

- Community Presentations on Energy Topics

Location

Ecolibrium3 is located at 2304 West Superior Street in Duluth, Minnesota.



Clientele

Ecolibrium3's main clients are homeowners of all incomes who are interested in living in a more environmentally friendly manner. They serve approximately 450 homeowners per year around the Duluth area.

Owners & Managers

Jodi Slick - CEO

Sarah Hannigan - Director of Program Development

Laura Beck - Finance Staff

Mike Braun - Energy Auditor

Anni Friesen - Outreach & Education Coordinator

Brennan Atchison - Digital Technology Specialist

Mike Cousino - Senior Graphic Designer

Kristen Huset - LISC AmeriCorps Member

Wanda Lundeen - LISC AmeriCorps Member

Mike Nordin - MN GreenCorps Member

Purpose of the Organization

The mission of Ecolibrium3 is “To assist individuals, businesses, and communities in creating balanced environmental and economic solutions for a sustainable future.”

“DEEP’s goals include moving residents from knowledge of energy efficiency into making their home more energy efficient, healthy and comfortable. DEEP helps homeowners save money, conserve energy, and reduce their impact on the environment. “



Introduction to Sustainable Twin Ports from Jeff Maida, STP Board Member, trainer, and financial advisor

Brief description of TNS

Provided by Dr. Geoffrey Bell, University of MN-Duluth

How did the organization find out about TNS/STP?

Ecolibrium3 had been familiar with the STP program for some time. They had looked at being an Early Adopter previously, but due to the work involved in implementing the DEEP program,

the timing wasn't right. Once the DEEP program was launched, they were able to utilize some stimulus training funds to pay for the STP training.

Why did they get involved with TNS/STP? Was this an internal initiative or was it responding to external pressures?

It was Ecolibrium3's internal drive to get involved with TNS/STP. They wanted to know what STP was all about. Also, it would be a good refresher course for Ecolibrium3 since the company is already focused on sustainability.

What did they learn?

Ecolibrium3 learned the exact process of The Natural Step. They also gained the common language of the industry. Previously Ecolibrium3 served as a national trainer on green housing, so they already knew quite a bit.

Why did the company see change as important?

The entire Ecolibrium 3 organization is focused on creating change in the Duluth community via educating homeowners about the benefits of being energy efficient and sustainably minded. Therefore, Ecolibrium 3 felt that participating in TNS/STP would be a good way to stay true to their mission.

Who within organization led the sustainability initiative?

Sarah Hannigan and Anni Friesen led the STP sustainability initiative of Ecolibrium3. They utilized grants from the 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act in order to cover the costs of the program.

Where was company when they started TNS?

They started early in 2011 when Ecolibrium3 was still a part of Common Ground Construction. In March of that year DEEP was launched, and by the time TNS training was finished, Ecolibrium3 was separate from Common Ground.

What had they already accomplished in terms of sustainability?

The four principles of Sustainability are as follows:

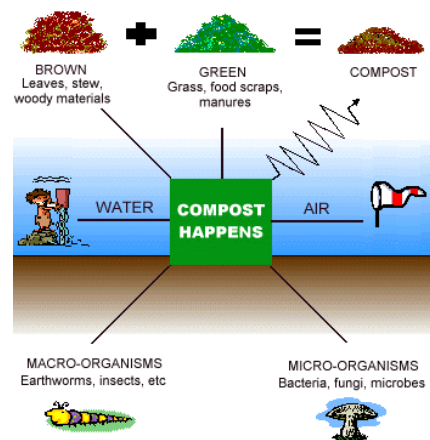
1. We are not extracting substances from the earth at a rate faster than they can be restored and/or allowing them to build up on the earth's surface.
2. We are not subjecting nature to man-made chemicals that cannot be broken down.
3. We are not physically degrading the earth.
4. People are able to make their basic needs.

Ecolibrium 3 is a “green” company. As a result, they have always focused on the principles of sustainability. Accomplishments of the Ecolibrium3 staff, while at Common Ground and as a new nonprofit entity include a national demonstration project for the United States Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) integrating active solar panels on ten low-income homes, serving as a pilot program by taking Green Communities standards and applying them to single-family new and remodeling projects, operating a construction materials reuse center and deconstruction company which reused over 2 million pounds of material from one project, and creating a national model for community weatherization programs. Each of these activities supports the principles of TNS.

What were sustainable practices?

Operationally, they use composting as a natural process of recycling organic material into the soil. Printing on both sides of the paper to save costs of paper and reduce the waste of trees. They have a sustainability challenge at home and work. They are constantly asking themselves “what is the next thing we can get into?”

Did the organization face any resistance and problems during its journey to date?



As Jodi Slick stated “Resistance? What resistance?” There was not much resistance since the company, and as a result, the employees, were already focused on being green.

How did the organization share with its employees its decision to become more sustainable?

They were already a sustainable company so they gave a presentation on STP to the other employees and the board of directors.

What action steps did company commit to? What did it actually achieve?

Ecolibrium3 worked towards getting the “low hanging fruit” first, or in other words, doing little things in order to become more sustainable. They started using CFL lights, recovering heat from the server room, printing on both sides of paper, composting, and implemented a garden exchange program.

“Big wins” for Ecolibrium3 are still in progress. They are constantly working on expanding the community’s awareness of TNS as well as the Duluth community as a “Transition Town.” This entails planning for low energy consumption in the future (see link at bottom) as well as helping others take the steps to TNS.

Effects of implementing sustainability to date

Top line effects

Ecolibrium3 became the host of the “Living Green by the Lake” Expo held in Duluth, MN. This event gives people information about saving energy and becoming more sustainable. "People are here today to learn to be more sustainable in their homes, how they can save energy, how they can use less chemicals, how they can learn to garden." said Jodi Slick CEO of Ecolibrium3. This event allowed them to network with other companies within the sustainable community.



Bottom line effects

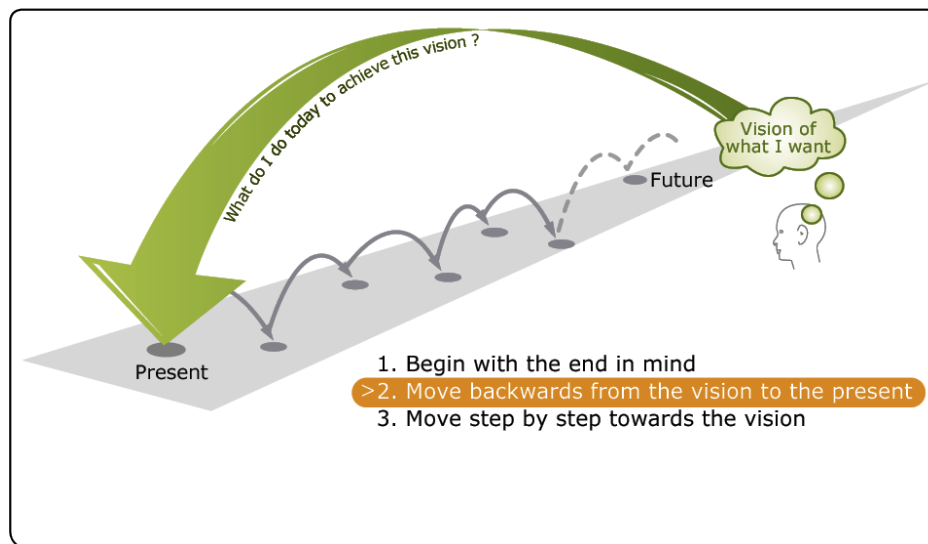
Ecolibrium3 added companies and businesses to their work instead of just individual clients.

What benefits did Ecolibrium3 reap?

Ecolibrium3 got a good recap about their business from STP. They learned the common language within the industry and gained a better understanding of TNS as a lens for decision making.

What have you learned from your experience?

Ecolibrium3 learned the process of back-casting by creating a goal and taking the appropriate steps to reach it. Everything they do takes time to accomplish. They view sustainability as a dimmer-switch instead of a light switch, "It [sustainability] happens in waves, and it takes time to get everyone on the same page. When people are more energized about sustainability, things can get done quicker."



The process of back-casting

What is the best thing to come from your sustainability journey?

Through their journey, Ecolibrium3 gained recycling awareness, the way they viewed the world changed, and they became more focused on doing the little things for now. They also became

more aware of sustainability and how the economic realities of sustainability affect everybody. They were also available to connect with other energetic people like themselves.

If you had to do it over, what would you do differently?

Ecolibrium3 didn't utilize STP as much as they would have liked. If they could go back, they would prepare better before starting the program. They also wish they had a clear idea about the program that best fit them.

Education and outreach

How is the organization sharing what it has learned about sustainability with others?

Ecolibrium3 is sharing what they have learned by getting minorities and youth involved in sustainability within the community.

Goals and future plans

Where does company want to go from here?

Some short term goals Ecolibrium3 would like to make include increasing community awareness of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Ecolibrium3 sees climate change, reduction in available resources, and the need to build community resilience as major issues. The Ecolibrium3 staff believes that good people need to take a stand to reduce the impact of climate change. They agree with Archbishop Desmond Tutu's statement that climate change is genocide.

Setting long term goals is difficult for Ecolibrium3 due to the environment and people they work with in society. It is not easy to make change happen. They are "battling an addiction to oil and it's hard to get people away from it." They would like to get things done in a more sustainable manner, yet experience the outcomes that are received from current practices. Ecolibrium3 pursues community change in areas that make both environmental and economic sense.

Time line from project inception through present and into foreseeable future

Started STP in February 2011



DEEP launched in March 2011



Ecolibrium3 separated from Common Ground in October 2011



Ended STP October 2011



Focus on changing people's view of sustainability

Quotes from the CEO regarding sustainability

“Create your vision, learn what you can do, and find your allies”

“Because”

Additional resources

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtcGTIsR964>

- This is a You-Tube link to transition towns that have emerged as a response to peak oil which makes a community more resilient.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onSHD4sAuB4>

- This You-Tube video features Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his argument that climate change is genocide.

<http://www.ecolibrium3.org/>

- Ecolibrium3's website.

<http://duluthenergy.org/>

- DEEP's website.