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Title: Developing Common Metrics - Moving Multiple Organizations to Action

Abstract: Despite myriad roadblocks to implementing policy that addresses climate change, there exists a significant amount of ambition at the local level to move towards sustainable forms of energy, increase the resiliency of our communities and address equity within our neighborhoods. Still, local governments and organizations are often faced with difficulty in finding entry points for action and aligning resources to address the impacts of a changing climate.

In 2018, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission completed the Franklin County Energy Study; a catalogue of energy production, consumption, expenditures and emissions. A suite of metrics was developed in order to create a baseline from which future change would be measured. Whereas any of the metrics could have become a banner to rally action, it was a ZIP code-level analysis of the residential energy burden that caused a surprising coalescing of initiatives locally, and garnered support nationally. The energy burden metric identified six communities within the City of Columbus where residents were paying an unaffordable proportion of their income to support their home energy needs. Programs addressing income inequality, infant mortality, energy efficiency and transportation were already in place or planned for some of these areas. Organizations including Smart Columbus, the United Way, the Ohio State University, local utilities and the Department of Neighborhoods had boots on the ground in the identified neighborhoods. Viewing these communities through a lens of energy burden allowed for the mobilization of a collective approach to typically independent issues.

Desiring a quick and significant change to this situation, the City of Columbus developed an intervention of increased energy audits, efficiency measures and job training. This proposal led the City to win one of the Bloomberg American Cities Climate Challenge awards and has brought together multiple organizations working towards a common goal. As this work was beginning, the Community Energy Savers program, a joint initiative between local utilities and the Department of Neighborhoods, was reinvigorated with a renewed focus on the neighborhoods identified by the energy burden metric. With the success of this one metric, MORPC is beginning to look at further opportunities not simply to measure, but to bring together multiple organizations through common causes as we move towards a sustainable future.