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Sunday, July 24, 2011

## Green awareness takes hold at Worcester conference

More than 100 attend Worcester conference



Facilitator Joe Scully of Worcester leads a workshop. (T&G Staff/PAUL KAPTEYN)

By Richard Duckett TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF  
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**WORCESTER** — According to people at yesterday's "Making a Green Solidarity Economy" conference, a green consciousness has already been planted in the city. The challenge now is how to help it grow and develop.

"There's so many people that want to be part of the solution," said Sarah Assefa, a member of the conference planning committee.

The conference was at the Worcester Youth Center, 326 Chandler St., and drew more than 100 people from Worcester County, Massachusetts, New England and beyond. "We've been hearing from people all over the county," Ms. Assefa said. As the title of the conference indicated, the goal of organizers was to combine support for environmental responsibility and sustainability with social and economic justice. In between introductory and concluding sessions, participants could choose from workshops dealing with topics such as building cooperative culture, sustainability initiatives across New England, building an alternative economy, and grass-roots action.

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"We do want this conference to be unlike other conferences in that we want results," planning committee member Judy Diamondstone said during a break.

Specifically, one of the things that will come out of the conference is "a map of sustainability initiatives and organizations committed to it in this area," she said. Such a map will help different groups build initiatives with those who share the same goals. "You can't do that unless you know who they are," Ms. Diamondstone said. Conference organizers are also planning to set up a fund to support initiatives in the Worcester area, she said.

The Worcester Green Jobs Coalition, which was founded in 2008, put the conference together. The planning process for the conference involved a wide coalition of interested parties, including individuals, community groups, organizations, and area businesses, said planning committee member Shreena Bindra. She noted that at Tuesday's City Council meeting, Mayor Joseph C. O'Brien had presented and read a proclamation declaring last week "Sustainability Week" in Worcester. Mr. O'Brien was at the conference yesterday and pointed out to visitors the Worcester Youth Center's "Rain Garden," where a garden absorbs storm-water runoff. U.S. Rep James P. McGovern, D-Worcester, spoke during yesterday morning's introductory session and stressed the importance of organizing and organization.

"People are talking about how we can collaborate on projects, that's no small outcome," said planning committee member Lazri DiSalvo.

A large number of bicycles could be seen parked outside the Worcester Youth Center, suggesting that quite a few people had pedaled their green consciousnesses to the conference. Ms. Bindra said that Worcester Earn-a-Bike, a nonprofit, community-based bicycle program, had donated a bicycle to the conference to be raffled. Proceeds from the raffle will go to the new initiatives fund.

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Nilson Chirinos of Springfield participates in a caulking workshop. (T&G Staff/PAUL KAPTEYN)  
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