

## **A Letter from Our Chancellor. *April 22, 2050.***

Dear Friends,

Greetings from Urbana-Champaign, on Earth Day 2050! The coming decade presents some great challenges. I am writing to assure you that despite these challenges, we at Illinois have many reasons to remain hopeful. In fact, the past forty years (2010-2050) have ranked among the University's best. But it wasn't by accident. Careful planning and a series of brave decisions have positioned us as a global leader in education and research. As we look forward, I would like to remind us all about how we got here.

Perhaps the most important decisions took place in the years between 2010 and 2020. The educational world first took notice when the University of Illinois stopped burning coal on its Urbana campus in 2014. When we finished building our first energy farm in 2015, skeptics derided our apparent naïveté. But by 2020, just as the smokestacks of Abbott power plant were replaced with a state-of-the-art clean-energy center, the University and the surrounding community began to reap the rewards of energy efficiency and conservation—in no small part because carbon taxes took hold at an unaffordable \$500/ton. The great leap of faith in 2010, it turns out, was a breath of fresh air.

Today, few people question the wisdom of our transition to clean energy, but the initial changes were not accepted with open arms. Individuals across campus and the State of Illinois raised concerns about the loss of jobs, the costs of conversion, and the efficacy of renewable energy sources at the State's flagship learning institution. Ultimately, however, we have produced more jobs than we lost, we've been able to repay our energy debts through gains in efficiency, and we were able to offer hands-on training to graduates emerging in the nation's green economy.

It helped that we were able to change the way we viewed our buildings, formerly notorious consumers of energy and producers of indoor allergens. Today our buildings are providers of comfort, space, water, energy, income, and even fresh produce.

By 2012 our campus and our city stopped sprawling and began to focus on the structures, facilities, and people already in place. While this might have appeared retrogressive to some, it has resulted in a much more rich and dynamic landscape. Everything from shopping, to commuting, to visiting the doctor's office is easily achievable on foot, and students are eager to reinvest their talents in Champaign-Urbana even after graduation. Our resolve to teach our students about sustainable and native landscapes has helped a great deal in that regard.

Our neighborhoods are much more interesting too. Few of us miss the isolation and expense of the McMansion era, and have opted instead to live in smaller, energy-efficient homes that lie within walking or biking distance to all the jobs, services, and friends we need.

We are healthier for this change. We are more physically fit, more active and generally need less care as we age. Those who do need care are more likely to get it from our neighbors and family – since a diversity of housing options allow families of every age, size, and income level to live close to their loved-ones.

Our good health is also a result of our improved eating habits. The local foods movements of 2010 really started to pay off when carbon taxes began to trickle down into industrial agriculture. Thankfully, we were well positioned and organized with former subdivisions being redeveloped into local food production sites. Our informal network became formalized in 2015 and by 2020 we had a good, organized and secure source of fresh food. The Sustainable Student Farm that was established in 2009 has expanded and now provides all of the produce used in our dining halls and campus events and has been a model for similar, community scale efforts.

As our neighborhoods have evolved into sustainable, walkable, communities, we now find very little use for cars. Traffic fatalities are an historic relic. The odor of automobile exhaust exists only in memory. Although cars are very cheap to buy, they are very expensive to operate and we really don't need them. Most of us bike or walk anyway since we live closer together and in better proximity to our places of work, and our path networks are so convenient. Our regional high speed rail system lets us get to Chicago, St. Louis, and beyond quickly, efficiently, and affordably.

Our understanding of infrastructure changed when students started to question whether their presence here was worth the investment. It forced us to develop new ways of reaching groups and educating them. Our current layering of community, education, information, and activity centers has been wildly successful. We have made learning an experiential activity.

Precipitation patterns have changed with global climate destabilization, but we met these changes with a robust plan for water conservation. Our new storm water management and green infrastructure plans have saved us from both drought and flooding.

When I sift through the historical records and chat with students and professors from the early twenty-first century, I realize that our community began to turn things around when we finally learned the difference between growth and development. We learned that quality of life is not connected to quantity of stuff. We've learned that investment and partnership with our community pays when students and their families choose to stay in Champaign-Urbana after graduation. Our literacy rates soared, teen pregnancies have declined, and racial and income divides seem negligible compared to the inequalities at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Our children are healthy and prosperous – in ways we could only imagine in 2010.

The UIUC campus and the Urbana-Champaign community have benefitted immensely from decisive action and careful planning, and from a vision of a cleaner, healthier, and safer campus. I am proud to work and live in this community, and hope to remain for decades to come.

Sincerely,

Future Chancellor  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Authored by Brian Deal, Assistant Professor, Department of Urban & Regional Planning,  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.