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## **A greener trail Portland shows the way for Tallahassee**

By Bill Berlow  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

It doesn't bother me when political and business leaders from Tallahassee go on fact-finding missions to such places as Chattanooga or Madison or Austin.

When my wife looks through the Pottery Barn catalog or some home-decor magazine, she does it for ideas, not to make our living space look as if it belongs to someone else.

So I think it's shortsighted when critics say it's a waste of time and money to find out what other cities have done right that we might adapt and make uniquely Tallahassee - just as it's absurd to suggest that our home is any less Berlow because of the insights Michele has gained from thumbing through magazines for the past 25 years.

But Tallahassee could do a better job of figuring out what it wants to be when it grows up, as attorney Brian Armstrong argued in his My View column Tuesday.

I suggest we've already begun the process, through a combination of coincidence, conscious effort and, if we're smart, enlightened opportunism.

Like Portland, Ore., before us, Tallahassee's future is green.

*Fast Company* magazine's already told us what more and more Tallahasseeans are finally realizing. Its July 2 "Fast Cities" list said the capital was "on the verge" of becoming a green leader.

That must have brought smiles to passionate environmentalists, most of whom undoubtedly would ask two questions: What took us so long, and are we *really* all that green?

The answer to the first depends a lot on whether your bias is primarily environmental or economic. The answer to the second is, of course we could be much greener.

But neither question frames the debate constructively.

Just as a group of civic-minded citizens calling themselves the Economic and Environmental Consensus Committee kindled the effort that seven years ago became Blueprint 2000, a growing

number of Tallahasseeans today see that economic prosperity and environmental sensibility need not conflict.

We shouldn't waste any time arguing whether we should be a capital of commerce or conservation. The obvious answer is: We should be both.

Portland, widely considered the greenest city in America, figured it out years ago, adopting sustainable land-use, transportation and environmental policies even before "sustainability" was in vogue.

Portland's critics over the years suggested it was a magnet for people who prided themselves on self-denial, because of policies and practices that encourage less, not more.

But as economist Joe Cortright pointed out this month in a "white paper" for *CEOs for Cities*, green policies in Portland have been a tremendous boon to that city's economy.

Cortright's report, called "Portland's Green Dividend," estimates that the city of 2 million saves \$2.6 billion a year in transportation-related costs alone. The money saved goes toward other expenses instead - housing, for example. Portland residents also spend more than average on outdoor recreation (and, incidentally, alcoholic beverages).

They also spend less time commuting than the average American. And, as Cortright points out, research suggests that there's an inverse relationship between commuting time and happiness. The more time we spend sitting in traffic, the less happy we are. But commuters didn't need a study to tell them that.

There's no question that Portland's green reputation has affected its population. People attracted to a community that pays more than lip service to sustainability are generally well-educated. "Not only do they disproportionately choose close-in neighborhoods, but unlike 25- to 34-year-olds in most metropolitan areas, those with college degrees in Portland are actually somewhat more likely to use the transit system than their less-well-educated counterparts," Cortright says.

America's best and brightest young people, the ones who supercharge regional economies through their intellectual and creative energy, are much more likely to be drawn to places where environmental responsibility - and green business practices - are well-established.

Tallahassee is already on the verge, as *Fast Company* reminded us. As the capital of a growing state that, as a result of Gov. Charlie Crist's latest initiatives, will turn even greener in the next several years, our potential is even greater to become a haven for green technology and other commercial enterprises.

That's where enlightened opportunism comes in. Our only significant obstacle is ourselves.

If we blow it, local leaders won't have to travel elsewhere to learn what went wrong.