Housing After The Hill

Leaving St. Olaf takes courage, responsibility, and the willingness to practice sustainable habits

Sustainable Housing After College

At St. Olaf, we have the privilege to participate in community living. This has made daily chores like cleaning, cooking, and transit easy or nonexistent.

As much as we may wish, life after St. Olaf is not like this. This guide will hopefully give you the tools to live more sustainably after St. Olaf. It is designed to help you pick your first apartment, what food you can buy, and how to face adversity in those tough times after leaving the Hill.

When thinking about leaving your home here, think first about your life here. Year after year, students leave futons, couches, fridges, and other items on the Hill. We would encourage you to donate these items to the community or a business like the Ole Thrift Shop. These ventures constitute a new type of social entrepreneurship that encourages community responsibility and sustainability.

After preparing to leave campus in a sustainable way, we would encourage you to think holistically about energy, transportation, water, resource use, and location when moving from St. Olaf.

SustainAbilities aims to encourage a sense of innovation and build courage to challenge conventional wisdom. We hope that this guide will get you started to building a new life after the Hill. Don’t forget about us Oles, we’re here to help you as you transition to your next big adventure!

"Peace on earth, good will to women-and men. We are called to peace. We are called to work. We have good work to do. Amen."

-Professor Jim Farrell, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Forum, St. Olaf College

Life After the Hill 2013

The SustainAbilities website - sustainabilities.stolaf.edu - can serve as a resource for recent graduates as well. Don’t forget about some of its resources for green living, environmental news, and consumer tips!
Location, Location, Location.

Location is the most important decision you’ll make regarding housing, for many reasons. Statistically, the second biggest expense of recent graduates is a car. Reducing your driving (or eliminating it) can save you hundreds of dollars a month, reduce your pollution, promote healthy habits, and save time.

Check out the yellow sidebar for some quick reasons why living in a walkable community is a valuable investment for your wallet and the planet.

Walkable Communities

Walkable communities have been the most common and only type of communities until the rise of fossil fuels and transportation in the 20th century.

Communities where you can walk to get your groceries, bike to work, and know your neighbors are difficult to find, but well worth the look.

How can you find a walkable community? One method is looking at [http://www.walkscore.com/](http://www.walkscore.com/). This website evaluates individual communities and gives them a score based on their walkability. This website not only looks at communities, but also provides resources for finding that perfect apartment.

Many of the most walkable communities are on either coast in the United States, and are often more affluent than newly minted graduates can afford. However, walkability is not out of reach. Minneapolis was listed as the ninth most walkable major city in the United States. It was also the most walkable community in the Midwest outside Chicago. Many communities, like Minneapolis, can remain viable and healthy options if amenities like public transit and bike trails are available for you to use.

Check out walkscore.com and think about how walkable communities can save money, promote healthy living, and protect the environment at the same time.

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**Location**

Reasons to live in a walkable community

1. **Money**
   Save money on gas and drive less. Take advantage of biking and public transit to save money and reduce pollution.

2. **Sustainability**
   You drive less by living closer to your places you work and run your errands, and emit less carbon pollution.

3. **Healthiness**
   Research has shown that those who live in walkable community weight 6-10 pounds less on average, and you will be happier and healthier!

4. **Time**
   Simply put, you will travel less. You’ll have more time to spend doing the things you love, as you won’t have to commute to work as long as you would have using a car.

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**Take Time Off!**

The first few years out of school, you’ll spend lots of time on the job. Remember to take time for yourself, and get outside. Spending more time outside will leave you refreshed, relaxed, and more aware of your environment.
Heating and Cooling

Windows are the biggest energy leaks in the home and account for 10-25% of your heating bill.

1. Make sure windows have drapes or blinds to regulate and control direct sunlight and radiation.

2. Trees on property can help utilize natural sunlight while blocking natural rays.

3. Windows that open are a bonus, as they allow for natural cooling.

4. Check for double-paned windows.

5. Consider insulation options for windows (Plastic coverings, insulation drapes...)

St. Olaf College, Flaten Art Barn

Heating and Cooling

Residential homes consume large amounts of gas and electricity to keep them warm in the winter and cool in the summer. There are many things you can do to keep your costs and environmental impact low:

- **Size Counts.** Don’t buy a bigger house or apartment than you need to save money on energy costs.

- **Insulation.** It’s the most effective way at reducing energy use (by saving!). It uses the unit R to measure effectiveness. The higher the R-value, the more effective it is. The higher R-valued insulation is used in places like the attic of a house.

- **Leaks.** Check and plug air leaks in your house (especially older buildings).

- **Thermostats.** Each degree of AC/Heating you use has an exponential effect on your energy use. You can save as much as 10% a year on heating and cooling by simply turning your thermostat back 7°F-10°F for 8 hours a day from its normal setting.

Water Heaters

Ask if the heater, as well as the pipes, are insulated. Also ask if you have a adjustable heater. Setting this to 120 degrees. Rather than 140 will save about 10% on your water heating costs!

Ceiling Fans

When shopping, looking for fans or ceiling fans in the rooms. If you use air conditioning, a ceiling fan will allow you to raise the thermostat setting about 4°F with no reduction in comfort. This small change will add up a lot over time!

Sustainable Living

In order to combat climate change, our generation must build sustainable and resilient communities. To do so, we need to build homes that can withstand the tests of time. When building or sourcing materials for a home (including furnishings), think about the supply chain of the products and where they came from. By doing so, you can think locally and try to reduce the carbon footprint of your home.
Putting it in the Landfill.

Most waste in the United States can be reused, recycled, or composted. In fact, most of us generate 4.3 pounds of direct waste per day. If you’re looking to reduce your carbon pollution, you want to avoid the landfill as much as possible. This is because landfills are major sources of methane gas pollution and water pollution. Methane pollution contributes to climate change, and is almost one hundred times more effective than carbon dioxide at heating the plant. Landfills count for nearly 22% of methane emissions in the United States, and you are a part of the solution to reduce pollution.

Think Deliberately

Landfills are a major contributor to pollution, but how have you thought about yourself as that contributor? Oftentimes, much of the waste we produce is never seen. This is because there is so much more pollution and waste that comes from the production of our consumer goods and the creation of new services.

We, as consumers and ecological citizens, can control the amount of waste we produce not just by wasting less ourselves, but by thinking deliberately about how we choose our products. Spend your money in places where the products created were produced sustainably and with care to the environment.

Food Waste

Here on the Hill, we have the ability and privilege to be able to compost all of our food waste from Stav Hall so it is not a total loss. Once leaving, you’ll want to be conscious about that food waste. In your future, not wasting any food will save you money, put less in the landfill, and waste less. Composting your extra waste can help your garden too!

Remember to Clean Your Plate!

Waste

When you arrive...

1. Recycling
   Figure out what kind of plastic and other materials can be recycled.

2. Compost
   Composting any leftover food waste can help reduce your waste output, and can produce viable soil for any garden. There are now ways to compost without the smell and hassle, so check it out!

3. Collection Times
   Check to determine what time different waste bins are collected. It might be helpful to know if the recycling goes out a different day than landfill, or if your location has curbside composting available.

4. Reuse
   Consider if products you’ve already own can have a longer life. Many dorm room items can be broken down and their components can be used for many things. You can even create art from this waste!

5. Reduce
   Waste reduction means reducing the amount of waste that we, you and I, produce every day. By using less we help conserve resources. Reduction is the first choice in reducing the waste stream. For example, consider buying less for your first apartment to save money and to keep waste down.
## Appliances

If you are renting a home or apartment, is it extremely likely the house will have appliances for you to use. What kind of appliances they are will factor into your energy usage and costs.

When thinking about purchasing new appliances:

1. **Size**
   Make sure your new (or used!) appliance fits in your home well. Also consider how big of an appliance you will need. Buying larger appliances can use more power even when they’re not in use.

2. **Energy Use and Efficiency**
   Consider price and efficiency. Sometimes, buying a more expensive brand may result in more savings and lower cost in the long run. Look for the Energy Star logo!

3. **Ask about offers**
   There are often rebates or tax credits for efficiency appliances. Check with the retailer about any special offers for your purchase.

### Washing Machine

As much as 90% of the energy used in a washer is to heat water. Washing with cold water drastically reduces your carbon footprint and energy costs. The rinse temperature does not have any noticeable effect on the quality of the wash either.

### Air Conditioner

If buying a new air conditioner, we recommend a model with an Energy Efficiency Ratio (EER) of 10 or higher.

By installing ceiling fans, you can reduce the temperature on the AC from 3-6 degrees, and can result in a 25% savings in energy costs.

### Refrigerator

In general, the refrigerator is the single largest consumer of power in households. Remember to not locate your fridge near any heat source (stoves) or direct sunlight. Also clean the coils in the back to maximize efficiency too.

When thinking about purchasing a new fridge, remember one large fridge is more efficient that two smaller ones. By getting rid of an old fridge(s) you can actually save on energy costs and reduce your power use!

### Computers

Most energy used by a computer comes from the monitor, so remember to turn it off at night and when you’re not using it. Also, by turning the machine off when it is not in use can reduce use of phantom electricity. Phantom electricity is when a machine (on standby) consumes electricity just by having it plugged in. You can buy special power strips that can save you money and reduce phantom power use!

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**Energy Star**

Energy Star is a standard developed by the United States government for energy efficiency. The program was used to leverage efficiency as a way to combat climate change. It is used internationally and can be found on almost all household appliances.

For almost all appliances (including things like water heaters), look for the Energy Star Label. You can go to energystar.gov to find specific appliances. Energy Star appliances typically use anywhere from 25% to 50% less energy than typical appliances.

This program rates appliances, based on efficiency, on a scale from 1-100. So next time you’re out shopping for a major household appliance, be aware of efficiency and how much you can save on money and energy in the long run.
Building Water Conservation Habits.

From Appliances to Habits

Leading a sustainable lifestyle after college doesn’t just apply to your power usage and your fossil fuel consumption. These sustainable skills you have can be extended to water as well.

Water is one of the most valuable commodities on our warming planet, and especially in places like the Southwest United States. In 2009, 45 states reported they were “water-stressed.” So what can you do to help out your neighbors?

Start off with the bathroom. Nearly 75% of water used in the house is used in the bathroom, with the toilet consuming nearly 25% of that bathroom water use. Investing in a low-flush can reduce the gallons you use to flush each time from an average of 4 gallons per flush (gpf) down to 2 gpf. For your bathroom, you can also reduce water use by turning off the water when you shave or brush your teeth, or invest in a low-flow shower head. These low-flow shower heads usually have little noticeable difference than a regular shower head.

In the kitchen, many people invest in a low-flow aerator. An aerator controls the water coming out of sinks. Generally, most bathrooms can have 1.5 gallons per minute aerators, with around 2.5 gallons per minute at the kitchen sink.

Most of these changes have been done by homeowners themselves without the use of tools as a way to reduce water use. It’s a simple operation you can do to conserve more and help out your own neighborhood.

Outside the Home

Your Lawn, Our Water

Lawns consume a surprising amount of water. Each square foot of lawn can use up to 20 gallons per year. Big lawns are nice, but consider what size lawn you really need and water.

Landscaping

When building your garden and home landscape, consider planting native shrubs, bushes, and grasses. This can reduce the need to use water, apply pesticides, and maintenance it. So plant native and save time, water, and resources!

Leaky Faucets

The proverbial “leaky faucet” causes more problems that the average graduate may think. It could be costing you a lot more, because just a small leak can send out many gallons over the course of one day.

In addition to just checking your sinks for leaks, you should be checking your toilet as well. Toilet leaks occur between the tank and the bowl. You can check this by putting food coloring in the tank, then waiting a half hour. If the food coloring shows up in the bowl, then you have a leak. Luckily, it’s relatively easy and inexpensive to fix! Also remember to check for outdoor leaks. It may not seem as obvious or wasteful, but they are just as bad as indoor leaks. Check your hose couplings, spigots, and pipes around the outside of your home to conserve water.
Utilities

Utility companies are required to provide services to increase energy efficiency

1. Contact energy provider to see what services available!
   Your energy provider has resources on their website for information on rebates and credits for energy efficiency.

2. Wind-Source your Power
   Most people are trying to figure out how to reduce their carbon footprint. By opting in to renewable energy sourcing programs, your energy service provider will increase renewable energy output.

3. Work with a landlord
   Work with your landlord to increase energy efficiency and use of renewables. There are often benefits, rebates, and credits that could actually decrease operating costs for your landlord if you’re renting.

Building a sustainable future, one home at a time.

When you’re apartment shopping or looking at a home, ask where the owners purchase utilities, and contact them to see how they produce energy. Most utility companies should be able to provide a breakdown. In Minnesota, Xcel Energy provides an option to homeowners to purchase wind-sourced electricity for merely pennies more on the kilowatt/hour. It’s a small cost to help make lasting environmental change.

Best of luck and Um! Yah! Yah!

We hope that this guide has been a valuable resource to learn more about housing after the hill. There are many different resources you can use to lower your carbon footprint, significantly reduce your energy bill, and become a more well-rounded ecological citizen.

If you have any questions or comments, send them to SustainAbilities. Feedback forms can be found on our website, sustainabilities.stolaf.edu.

Good Luck and Um! Yah! Yah!

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