

Livable Places Update

Emerging Trends in Community Planning and Design

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www.lgc.org

The New Partners for Smart Growth Conference will be held in Kansas City in February - Below we describe some inspirational projects that will be showcased as part of the 2013 conference program.

Demolished Town Rebuilds To Become a Model Green Community: Greensburg, Kansas is a small, rural town in Kiowa County, Kansas. On May 4 of 2007, a massive tornado destroyed this town of about 1,600 people. The tornado was estimated to be 1.7 miles in width — wider than the city itself. Ninety-five percent of the city was completely destroyed and the remainder severely damaged. Fortunately, sirens sounded in the city twenty minutes before the tornado struck, saving many lives.

Greensburg is not a wealthy community. The median income in 2000 was \$28,348 and a quarter of the population was over 65. Fortunately, the Governor and the President both declared the County a disaster area, opening up disaster aid from national and international sources.

Following the destruction of literally everything they had, the undeterred citizens of Greensburg decided they wanted to rebuild. While they realized they were facing a huge challenge, they took a more optimistic view, seeing themselves as blessed with a unique opportunity. They would make Greensburg a model green community!

The survivors took steps to form "Greensburg Green Town" a nonprofit corporation that would raise and distribute grants and donations, serve as an educational resource, and work with local government officials, business owners and local residents to help incorporate sustainable principles into the rebuilding process. (<http://www.greensburggreentown.org>) The City Council followed suit, passing a resolution stating that all city buildings would be built to LEED platinum standards — becoming the first city in the nation to do so.

Today the population consists of 777, and they are hearty people. Visitors can see wind turbines from most locations in town — the City's power is supplied by ten 1.25 MW wind-turbines. The windmills provide more than twice as much power than is needed to power every house, business, and municipal building in Greensburg. Excess power will be placed back on the grid and offered as renewable energy credits for other electricity providers.

Solar panels adorn most buildings on Main Street. A new arts center, built to stringent LEED Platinum standards integrates its solar panels and wind generators for energy self-sufficiency.

The new City Hall, completed in 2009, has been awarded LEED Platinum status. The building maximizes day lighting and employs energy efficient lights, both inside and outside. Photovoltaic solar panels are integrated into the vegetated roof and provide more than 11% of the building's energy. South facing windows offer natural heating on sunny days. Rainwater is collected and stored on the rooftop garden and used to irrigate the native plant landscape. Overall, City Hall is achieving an estimated 46% reduction in energy costs. (www1.eere.energy.gov/office_eere/pdfs/49314.pdf) Dual-flush toilets and waterless urinals are reducing wastewater generation by more than 50%.

Even individual Greensburg residents who lost their homes have been rebuilding, creating residences that are models of energy and resource efficiency. Fifty-two percent of the new homes permitted between May 2007 and March 2009 were voluntarily rated for energy efficiency. Nine townhome rental units are projected to use 41% less energy than a standard home. Thirty three homes will use on average 25% less energy than a standard home.

While Greensburg stands as an important model of sustainability, the community is even more impressive as a testament to the human spirit. It is a community that has overcome great loss and adversity by directing their grief toward building a tribute to those who lost their lives while giving future generations the opportunity to live more sustainable lives. Their strong sense of community and pride in their work is palpable. Attendees at the New Partners Conference will have a rare opportunity to learn from Greensburg's extraordinary experience.

Neighborhood Makeover Called Most Environmentally Friendly in the Country: The Marlborough area of South Kansas City, once a prestigious neighborhood built during the thirties, has for many years been marred by an aging infrastructure. Streets have been crumbling, there are no curbs or sidewalks and the sewer capacity was inadequate. Wide streets encouraged cars to drive at unsafe speeds; and streets turned to rivers during heavy periods of rain, as water flowed over the asphalt and into some basements.

The population is young, over half have been to college, and about half are African American. Today, this 100-acre neighborhood is a highly attractive, well-landscaped place to live and a lovely place for kids to play or adults to take a stroll. What spurred this magical transformation?

About three years ago, owners of the 300 homes and miscellaneous businesses in the neighborhood heard that the EPA and Department of Justice were going to require them to take steps to prevent sewer overflows and the pollution of streams. This would require that the entire street be dug up to install massive pipes for sewer upgrades and a lot of underground storage tanks. The estimated cost — \$9.2 million dollars. The City planned to finance this cost through significantly increased sewer fees over a period of about seven years.

City officials knew that if residents were going to tolerate this massive investment, they were going to want to see something for their money. Thus the idea of a two-fer — a plan to contain urban runoff while improving the quality of the neighborhood — was proposed as an alternative to the one being required by the Justice Department and the EPA. According to the City's attorney, this was the first time a city council said to the EPA and the Justice Department, "Your plan isn't green enough." The City successfully negotiated a settlement that replaced the EPA's concrete and pipes solution with a groundbreaking and very aesthetically pleasing green alternative.



Marlborough area, South Kansas City — improving the quality of the neighborhood while containing urban runoff.
Courtesy of Fox News Ch 4

Today, about 150 visually-attractive storm water controls have been installed including rain gardens, stair-stepped gardens on sloped streets, and landscaped curb extensions that redirect water and slow traffic at the same time. Pedestrians now enjoy attractive sidewalks that are porous enough to immediately absorb buckets of rain. Narrowed streets have slowed car traffic. And some residents now have new rain barrels attached to their downspouts and/or have been provided with rain gardens in their back yards.

The City's Water Services Department is one of several city entities involved in the project. Residents are also getting help with minor home repairs and weatherization and low-interest loans from a credit union to manage the water on their own properties.

It is reported that a big reason this effort has been so successful is that residents have been active and engaged. According to Kansas City Mayor Sly James, "This project is the perfect example of a collaborative effort between citizens and government and government and business, to get something done."

The 100-acre project represents one part of the entire 744-acre Marlborough area. Improvements will be made to the remainder of that section of the city in the years ahead. (<http://www.marc.org/newsreleases/marc072111.htm>) (<http://fox4kc.com/2012/07/16/kcmo-officials-unveil-green-neighborhood-project/>)

At the February 2013 New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, Marlborough Community Coalition leaders, city staff, educators and business owners will share how partnerships and passion continue to bring positive change to the Marlborough neighborhood. In addition to attending a workshop, conference participants can sign up for a tour, and take the opportunity to see and photograph the impressive, just-completed green infrastructure streetscapes.

Growing Suburban City Takes Steps to Enhance Water Quality: Lenexa is a suburban community of about 50,000 in Johnson County, Kansas. About a third of the city's 32 square miles is already developed, with a lot of growth happening in the past ten years. This new and growing city offers another example of a community "putting the public first in public works."

In 1996, city leaders initiated a community visioning process to provide direction and focus for maturing areas of the city as well as for future development. During this process, a ravaging 100-year storm occurred that led to some loss of life. Also, around this time, the city found out they would need to address water quality issues related to stormwater management under new NPDES requirements.

Rather than continuing to look at stormwater as an excess to be sent elsewhere, the planners came up with a new idea, redefining stormwater as an asset on which to capitalize rather than a problem to be solved. The City has moved on to an approach that reduces flooding and protects water quality while at the same time protecting wildlife habitat and providing new recreational opportunities by preserving open space.

A tour of this project, offered at the New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, will include examples of bioretention cells, water quality ponds, wetlands, preserved areas, and native vegetation. Participants will also learn about innovative ordinances that govern detention and stream setback areas in new development. If you wish, spend the day, bring your fishing pole, hike the trails, carry in your boat, and take this chance to enjoy the beauty of nature!

To learn more about the agenda and tours offered as part of the New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, and to register, go to www.NewPartners.org.