

73  
2010

# City Regeneration

KCAP: **REGENERATION TODAY** • BECKER/VON BORRIES: **BERLIN** – LANDSCAPE STRATEGY • SCOTT HAWKEN: **CARBON OFFSET FORESTS** • TERREFORM ONE: **NEW YORK 2110** • MVVA: LOWER DON LANDS **TORONTO** • ALEX KRIEGER: BIG DIG **BOSTON** • ISABELLE MOUTAUD: **ST. LOUIS** CITY REGENERATION • SJØWALL OFTEDAL/BERG: NATURBANIA IN **DRAMMEN** • WYBE KUITERT: **SEOUL** AS LANDSCAPE SYSTEM • GINI LEE: SOUTH BANK **BRISBANE** • XIAODI ZHENG: SHICHAHAI LAKE **BEIJING** • **ESSAYS**: JOSEPH BROWN: BE LEADERS! • DIANA BALMORI: LANDSCAPE MANIFESTO



# ST. LOUIS

## Large Scale Inner City Regeneration

An exceptionally large and bold private initiative has set a plan to regenerate the NorthSide area, one of the United States's most derelict neighbourhoods. Beyond new parks and public spaces, the ambitious proposal calls also for social and infra-structural transformation.

Just minutes north of the gleaming St. Louis Arch is one of the United States's most desperate and derelict neighbourhoods. The NorthSide, in the heart of downtown St. Louis, encompasses 350 city blocks in a state of accelerating decline where less than 1,000 people live. The infamous Pruitt-Igoe complex abandoned as rubble in the 1970s defines this area whose decline started as far back as the late 19th century with a cholera epidemic and the economic backslide that occurred when rail replaced the Mississippi River for industrial transport. Extraordinary population loss, abandoned or collapsing buildings and vacant lots are the norm. Low education levels, high unemployment and health indicators that rival third-world countries have contributed further to making this once-thriving downtown neighbourhood into one of the most dangerous in North America. Although many small scale, public and grass roots revival efforts have been made in the last two decades, the blight and neglect are too deep and public resources too slim to effect the massive changes necessary for true regeneration.

However, for the past five years, an exceptionally large and bold private initiative has set a plan to regenerate the area. Motivated by a desire to invest in his hometown where it most needs it, a St. Louis developer has slowly acquired nearly 1,000 parcels from willing owners throughout the 1,500 acres that make up NorthSide. He commissioned the landscape architecture firm Civitas to create a comprehensive regeneration plan. After extensive research, analysis and many civic and public meetings, the team determined that the plan needed to address all elements of city-making to restore this neighbourhood.

Extracted from a total of 50 indicators discussed with local land owners, public officials and concerned citizens, Civitas outlined seven key principles to form an integrated, balanced approach to the sustainable regeneration of NorthSide that will span decades:

- Green Framework – integrate green space throughout and provide accessible, pleasant public places, as well as on-site water filtration and flood mitigation;
- Education – provide a variety of public and private education opportunities for all ages by rehabilitating existing schools and building new job training centres;
- Economic Development – preserve current jobs and create new ones while facilitating social equity and supporting growth opportunities for key industry sectors and employee capabilities;
- Transit Network – design a safe transportation system that encourages walking, biking and mass transit and connects residential, commercial and retail areas;
- Clean Energy – provide a clean, reliable energy network through upgraded infrastructure, distributed power generation and on-site renewables;



Since the early 1900s drastic changes in density have transformed NorthSide from the residential heart of St. Louis into a poignant example of inner city neglect in the USA. The plan at top left illustrates density in 1909 and contrasts sharply with the 2003 delineation.



An ecostructure of streets, neighbourhood parks, bike lanes, stormwater retention, and bioswales will provide a framework for regeneration. The existing street grid is retained and sometimes restored for redevelopment. The plan also reduces street widths to accommodate a proposed trolley within a network of pedestrian and bicycle routes.

- Healthy Community – foster a safe, healthy and integrated community that embodies the aspirations of both current and future residents; and
- Collaborative Leadership – regenerate community through innovative collaborations, partnerships and other inclusive strategies for governance, management, job training and employment in the activities of leading and serving the community.

Each principle is supported by measurable objectives to guide the success of the project over time. The plan includes percentage target goals related to raising median income, reducing the high school drop-out rate and unemployment, increasing school enrollment at a young age, maintaining low energy costs to citizens, adding mass transit service to job areas, increasing walkability to work and transit, decreasing sewer overflows, increasing properties facing greens, minimizing crime rate, among many others.

The Green Framework constitutes an essential base to the plan's success. Inspired by the design team's philosophy that nature enriches life in cities, the plan sets a green network of streets, trails, parks and public spaces that weave through the entire site to heal the land and encourage pride of place. As it connects existing pockets of vitality to each other and to adjacent vibrant neighbourhoods, the system allows this extremely poor population to walk safely to job centers, mass transit and healthcare and food outlets, creating more opportunities for economic growth along the way. In all the plan increases parks and green spaces five-fold, with 17

**NORTHSIDE REGENERATION, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, USA**

Client: NorthSide Regeneration, LLC

Primary developer: McEagle Properties, LLC

Urban design and landscape architecture: Civitas

Sustainability engineering: Buro Happold

Civil engineering: Cole and Associates, Inc.

Transportation engineering: Crawford, Bunte, Brammeier (CBB)

Environmental consultant: Lafser & Associates, Inc.

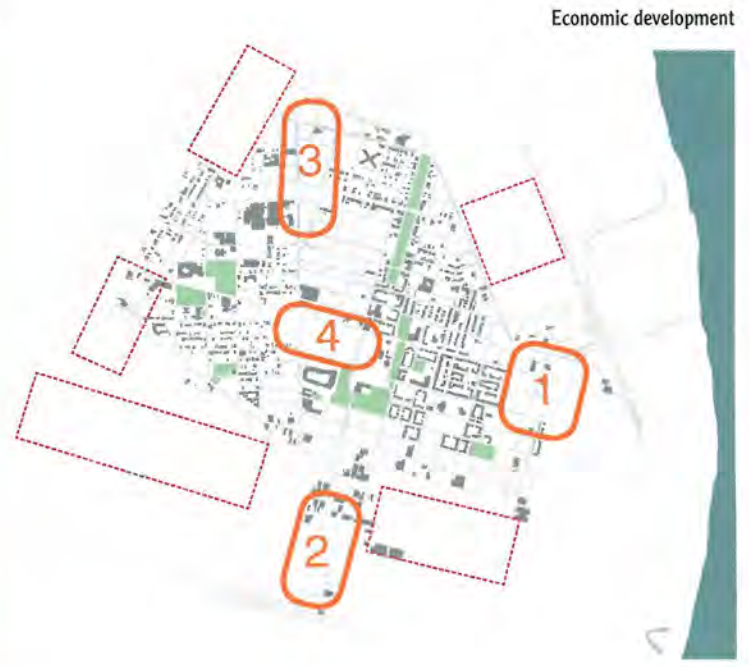
Real estate consultant: CPDC/DRG

Economic development: Development Strategies

Legal consultant: Stone, Leyton & Gershman

Area: 1,500 acres (600 hectares)

On-site renewable energy sources such as biomass, solar, wind and hydro will unite with a cogeneration network and smart grid to make NorthSide one of the most efficient and sustainable redevelopments of its kind.



miles of green streets, 51 acres of parks and 20 miles of green pathways. In addition to this foundation of renewed, attractive and secure public realm, the plan proposes significant transformations in infrastructure, social services and economic development. Some of the essential infrastructural changes include uncoupling the failing combined sewers (some of it still in wooden pipes), establishing a fixed guideway trolley, creating energy co-generation subdistricts and smart grid, and bringing bandwidth network. The latter two would be essential for attracting “clean” industry to the site.

Avoiding the more suburban ideas of creating a park at the site’s core on the Pruitt-Igoe rubble, or developing large islands of single-family homes, the plan directs specific economic proposals to four sub-areas. Their location and existing amenities make them more likely bases to trigger an economic renewal that will spread its riches outward. The plan proposes 10,000 new dwelling units with a majority in the low- and mid-income mix, 3.5 million square feet of office and one million square feet of retail services. It also locates substations for police and fire, four community centres, renovated schools and one healthcare centre.

Parallel to shepherding the design framework, the political presentations, and the neighbourhood meetings, the landscape architects had to redirect some major projects already in place that would impede the neighbourhood resurgence – such as the reconfiguration of the landing of the

The design strategy bases neighbourhood centers in key locations where job development, green space and active mixed uses will contribute to the reestablishment of the community.



Creating job centers is a high priority for the regeneration of this low-income neighbourhood. Narrower streets, wider sidewalks and mid-rise buildings will provide an environment that is attractive to businesses and a new workforce.



Mississippi River bridge, and a new 50-acre urban block pattern that will redevelop and complete the west end of the downtown Gateway Mall.

For the past two years, Civitas and the developer have presented this regeneration plan to local and state officials and the federal administration to secure funds and bring all possible policies and resources to the project. Because of its comprehensive nature and demonstrated long-term commitment from the private sector, the regeneration of NorthSide has finally gained support and financial momentum. The development plan, development agreement and tax-increment financing were all approved recently and will bring 390 million US dollars for basic infrastructure improvements. The total infrastructure cost for the proposed green plan is 1.2 billion US dollars. The city has also agreed to turn over to the developer 135 acres of property they own on the site in the form of a back-end agreement. The team has also created alliances with schools from K-8 through college, the utilities companies, the oldest Settlement house to provide social services and the largest healthcare provider in the region. On the private side, a large retailer has committed to becoming the first food centre in the neighbourhood and a leading manufacturer of green batteries is negotiating for a site.

The NorthSide is an opportunity to rebuild from scratch one of the country's largest inner cities. It will showcase what the best in green infrastructure can do to make our communities economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. But more important, the NorthSide plan can change the lives of the most downtrodden citizens of St. Louis by transforming the future of downtown and the region.



Essential social principles of the regeneration plan include the preservation and renovation of existing buildings and grounds. The old Clemens Chapel (top) and the Cass School (bottom) are two of the few significant landmarks in the area.