

Land

Search

Home » Connecting vacant land and historic waterways

Practice areas

- Arts & Culture
- Building
- Economy
- Education
- Energy
- Food
- Health
- Land
- Spirit
- Transportation
- Water
- Zero waste

Projects

- Planning & development projects

About

- About us
- Contact
- Donate
- Join
- Network map
- Sustainability jobs

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- Administer
- Blogs
- Forums
- Image galleries
- Latest images
- My account
- Node locations
- Quotes
- Recent changes
- User locations
- Create content
- Recent posts
- Log out

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Connecting vacant land and historic waterways

View Edit Outline Track

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Posted in: Green infrastructure

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What should Cleveland do to make its 3,300 acres of vacant land more desirable?

The Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative and Neighborhood Progress, Inc. are engaged in an innovative planning process to help the city answer that question. They are working on a course of action that could turn heavily urbanized land into farms, gardens or natural areas that could supply local food, absorb rain water, produce renewable energy and employ city residents.

Ultimately, they hope to figure out where and how to best restore ecological function and create new value in land that was long ago written off as damaged beyond repair.

With the city's help, they have already produced a decision matrix to categorize long vs. short term strategies. By fall, 2008 project managers Terry Schwarz (UDC) and Bobbi Reichtell (NPI) will collect the plans into a visual pattern book that will guide city planning. The pattern book and matrix will respond to issues like lot size, proximity to future development, visibility of the location, and even where historic streams and creeks were buried.

For example, in Slavic Village, which has been devastated by the sub-prime mortgage fiasco, a large urban farm/village green might be possible. Or, next to parking lots and on the side of roads, bioswales could be planted (these are vegetative areas that capture and treat rain rushing off pavement).

The point is, green infrastructure can improve conditions in almost every area of the city, by providing food, creating jobs, supplying raw materials—such as beet juice to de-ice the roads—and save a cash-strapped city hundreds of thousands of dollars compared to building pipes underground to handle the same amount of rainwater.

On this last point, UDC is working with Charles Frederick, a landscape architect and adjunct faculty member at Kent State, putting a dollar value on restoring six watersheds in the city. Frederick supposes: What are the benefits of daylighting streams that were long-ago buried, and establishing a 100-foot buffer area or riparian corridor around them?

For example, a buried stream with headwaters near E. 96th Street and Quincy Avenue in Central which runs through the Cleveland Clinic and the Upper Chester LEED-ND neighborhood and Case's West Campus before connecting with the Lagoon in University Circle: What if we constructed 15 acres of stormwater wetlands and replaced 22-acres of hard surfaces with trees, rain gardens and a reconstructed stream channel?

Frederick estimates that project would generate green infrastructure benefits:

- Air pollution removal 10,332 lbs removed/yr (\$23,867 value)
- Carbon storage & sequestration 4,300 total tons stored (33.48 tons annual)
- Stormwater – Quantity 169,529 cubic feet storage (\$339,058 savings)

"Charles' numbers are a basis for comparing the relative benefits of re-forestation on vacant sites," Schwarz explains. "The dollar values are a measure of how much it would cost to achieve a



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October						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

