

THE GREEN INSTITUTE

Minneapolis, Minnesota

The GREEN Institute is the name of an organization and the building the organization is creating on a site in the Phillips Neighborhood of Minneapolis that was previously intended to be a waste transfer plant. The mission of The GREEN Institute is "to create community-based models to protect and nurture the natural and urban environment through education and sustainable economic development." The Institute plans to eventually create 200 - 300 jobs through the following projects:

- A Materials Exchange and ReUse Center retail store. The Center is slated to open in October 1995.
- An eco-industrial park that includes a business incubator for 15-20 enterprises that pioneer new environmentally sound technologies and products. There are currently 10 prospective tenants for the incubator.
- A think tank that develops ideas for new enterprises. Some potential projects are a community window factory and a garden and lawn center.
- An urban environmental education and job training center that will promote understanding of the urban environment and industrial and community ecology.
- Office space for non-profit environmental advocacy groups.
- Landscaping and garden demonstration areas throughout the complex.

Construction on The GREEN Institute building, which will house the incubator, think tank, education and job training center and office space, is scheduled to begin in 1996. It will be built using salvageable and reused materials and will incorporate features that minimize energy consumption and waste generation. Three people currently work at the Institute and eight work at the ReUse Center.

The GREEN Institute site is one mile from downtown Minneapolis, in the southeast corner of the Phillips neighborhood, Minnesota's poorest and most ethnically diverse neighborhood. This location was the site of a 12-year struggle between the city and the county and neighborhood residents who defeated plans to build a large

county garbage transfer station in their community.

Turning a negative into a positive

The struggle over the transfer station began in 1981. In 1992, the activists fighting the transfer station met with a professor from University of California Riverside. Annie Young, the founder of The GREEN Institute, recalls that "When we said we were tired, she asked what will you all do when you win this struggle; what's your plan for the land? She went on to say that you have to turn a negative into a positive. That generated the dream and is one of the driving forces of this project. We are taking a negative and turning it into a positive."



Young, a long-time community organizer from the Phillips Neighborhood, later had a dream of a sustainable vision for the site with windmills, trees and wildlife surrounding a building with solar panels. She shared this vision with the rest of the group who liked it and helped turn it into a concept on paper which eventually became The GREEN Institute. During the end of 1992 and all of 1993 Annie Young and others worked to plan The GREEN Institute.

Money for The GREEN Institute has and will come from a variety of sources. The Institute hired a capital fundraising company to help start a capital campaign for the industrial park building. The GREEN Institute received \$415,000 in Early Access funds as part of a larger amount allocated to the People of Phillips organization by the City of Minneapolis' Neighborhood Revitalization Program. Some future funding for The GREEN Institute will be received in 1996 from the same program.

The Institute has received approximately \$280,000 from a federal Enterprise Community (EC) grant. Profit-generating centers, including the ReUse Center, are being developed to support the Institute's non-profit work such as the planned education center.

ReUse Center

When the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners voted not to build the transfer station they did keep funding for one component: a building materials exchange and reuse center. The County Board gave The GREEN Institute \$30,000 in 1993 to do a feasibility study for the Center and followed that the next year with a \$100,000 grant to set up and open the ReUse Center.

The ReUse Center is stocking doors, windows, sinks and many other reusable pieces from dissected buildings, which will be sold to low income people and environmentally conscious builders. Rising refuse disposal costs, the development of an environmental ethic encouraging reuse of materials, and the need for affordable construction and remodeling materials in a low-income community make the ReUse Center a viable concept, according to George Garnett, The GREEN Institute's executive director. The store hopes to stimulate additional enterprises in the area; for example, there might be crews of people who contract to salvage the guts of houses scheduled for demolition.

The ReUse Center will be opening in a 26,000 square-foot space in the Hi-Lake Shopping Center, across the street from the eco-industrial park site. Recently, the McKnight Foundation awarded the ReUse Center a \$150,000 grant. The ReUse Center also is getting \$250,000 from a federal Enterprise Community (EC) grant for rehabilitation of its building.

Eco-Village

Another project of The GREEN Institute is the Eco-Village which aims to revitalize the Phillips Neighborhood by working with residents to create a community that is sustainable both environmentally and economically. The project is not designed to require substantial capital investment, but rather to emphasize the improvement of local systems in order to create incentives and reshape the traditional patterns of consumption, development and employment into more efficient and sustainable patterns. In the Eco-Village, there will be an emphasis on energy efficiency, stressing passive solar heating and cooling, encouraging local food production, and

reliance on local resources; and fostering creation of on-site jobs and neighborhood stores to revitalize communities and eliminate commuting.

The Eco-Village will be aided by a revolving loan fund. The District 4 neighborhood group will set specific design guidelines for all new construction and rehabilitation. The fund will finance changes in existing structures made by homeowners or landlords. These loans will be made in stages. The early stages will be for simpler conservation changes like getting every house to full insulation, retrofitting windows, and installing low-flow toilets. Later stages will be for homeowners or landlords who want to generate their own electricity through photovoltaic cells or wind generators.

Environmental Design Charrette

The GREEN Institute will participate in an environmental design charrette (EDC) to involve the community and youth in the planning and design of the Institute. The charrette is one of 19 organized nationwide by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Committee on the Environment and will take place on October 6-8, 1995. EDCs are intensive short-term workshops that are part of a longer, multi-disciplinary project study. According to the AIA, EDCs will educate citizen groups and make resources accessible to them; foster linkages among the community, professionals and the government; and accelerate the economic, environmental and energy benefits that can be realized through the adoption of sustainable development principles and practices. At the charrette, they will start by sharing information: maps, dreams, and slides of the neighborhood. Work teams will then be formed with community members and design professionals.

Education/community involvement

The GREEN Institute is committed to educating the community about sustainability. "We are doing education now," says Annie Young, "People call us all the time and we go speak about the project. We are starting a workshop series in the fall on sustainability. We also see this as an eco-tourist site—we are building the design so that it can be an education center. One of our big commitments is to transfer our information." This includes publishing The GREEN Institute's quarterly newsletter, *Green News & Views*.

One of the key elements in the success of The GREEN Institute has been the involvement and support of the Phillips

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Scope: Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis

Inception Date: 1992

Participants: Neighborhood residents, community organizers/activists

Project type: Community economic development, environmental justice/equity, citizen-led initiative

Methods used: Community education, community planning, eco-industrial park, business incubator, re-use of construction materials

Lessons learned: It takes a lot of time and patience to make a project like this work. The more people that are involved, the bigger the dream will become.

Neighborhood. Annie Young is using her organizing skills to educate the community. "I have been out hitting the pavement and talking to people," says Young, "Once the neighborhood bought into it, it was a lot more successful. Building community is about many many people being involved. When you're building a community it has to be a bigger picture."

Young says that the biggest barrier to the project's success has been government bureaucracy, "Government never makes things easy for people. Our local politicians have not necessarily been as cooperative as other branches of government." However, this has been compensated for by support from other areas, "We are getting help from a lot of resources that we never expected. You have to reach out to a broader community, everybody wants to help; the reuse center has gotten an incredible amount of in kind donations."

The GREEN Institute is committed to changing the quality of life for Phillips Neighborhood residents. "Inner-city neighborhoods don't have to erode into

slums, and they don't have to be gentrified," says Annie Young, "They can be restored and maintained for their original mission: as healthy environments for people of diverse means to live, work and grow together."

—Jobs & Environment Campaign



UPDATE

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Major new developments include city approval to develop the EcoIndustrial Park site, an extensive community-based design process which produced a master plan, and the addition of professional staff to work on business development and to attract ecopreneurs. The building will be 64,000 sq.ft., use 75 percent less energy than a structure of comparable size, and employ both renewable and energy efficient technologies. Construction is planned for the spring of 1998. The director, Michael Krause, believes that nationwide there continues to be a lot of interest in and opportunities for creating EcoIndustrial Parks, but implementation is a challenge, so networking among interested parties is essential. Baseline studies on basic flows such as waste, human resource needs, energy, and the needs of small businesses are critical but difficult to obtain.

The ReUse Center has streamlined its operation with a 30-60-90 day pricing policy to increase inventory turnover and has become more proactive in obtaining salvaged material at deconstruction sites. A five-person crew, hired through a \$50,000 state grant, will help Honeywell Corporation deconstruct 15 structures in a two-block area and then use the materials for new building and for resale at the Center. The director foresees increased interest in and funding for deconstruction both in federal agencies with respect to public housing and other buildings and within the local business market.

The GREEN Institute continues to attract interest and funding, including a 1996 \$498,000 grant from U.S. Health and Human Services, because of its comprehensive, long-term approach to job creation, livable wages, and skills training, and because it offers people a place to grow and learn life skills such as money management and job ethics.

—CONCERN, Inc.