Introduction

MetroGreen is a regional greenway system for the Kansas City metropolitan area. It is principally comprised of linear corridors of land found along streams, roadways and within abandoned rail corridors. The purpose of MetroGreen is to establish an interconnected system of trails that will link the seven-county metropolitan region. MetroGreen is a natural extension of the Kansas City area’s trails heritage.

In 1991, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) held its Annual Meeting in Kansas City. As is customary, the Society undertook a Community Assistance Team Project and presented the product as a gift to the host city. In 1991, that gift was the Vision of a Kansas City Metropolitan Greenway System, or MetroGreen.

The MetroGreen Vision has served admirably for 10-years as a guide for metropolitan greenway development. Many local communities have developed local plans and constructed trail segments consistent with this regional vision concept. However, it has become apparent that more details need to be articulated before a comprehensive system can come to be. This MetroGreen Regional Greenway Initiative is the handbook for completing a Kansas City metropolitan area greenway system.

Completion of MetroGreen will result in a more comprehensive metropolitan system of open space and trails that links with local systems to increase access to outdoor resources. The benefits of a fully-developed MetroGreen system include: preservation and restoration of important natural streamways and environmental resources, non-automotive options for people that commute to work and school, more recreation resources, a more unified metropolitan area, and greater access to Kansas City’s economic, cultural, and historic destinations.

The Kansas City metropolitan area is not the first in the nation to consider the importance of developing a regional greenprint. In the late 1960’s both Chicago and Denver began developing extensive greenspace projects that have flourished during the past 30 years. The Chicago Openlands Project has protected thousands of acres of land throughout the metropolitan area, and has been used to link together the famed Forest Pre-

Purpose of MetroGreen

Regional Greenprints
serves of the region. Denver began with a rather modest restoration and revitalization of the Cherry Creek corridor through the downtown area, and now boasts more than 200 miles of interconnected greenways, open space lands and parks.

Since 1997, the metropolitan region of Minneapolis and St. Paul has been working with the State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to develop Metro Green. This project is a collaborative, public/private effort to develop and manage a regional network of natural areas, parks and other open spaces interconnected by ecological corridors in the seven county metropolitan region. The southeastern region of Michigan (Detroit area) completed plans for an 8-county metro greenprint in 1998. The five-county metro region of Tulsa, Oklahoma prepared a trails and greenways plan in 1999.

The St. Louis region has also been working diligently to develop a bi-state, metropolitan greenprint. Spurred by the community’s bicentennial in 2004, the legislatures of Missouri and Illinois have granted authority to institute a local tax and create “regional park authorities” in the East St. Louis region of Illinois and the St. Louis region of Missouri. The goals of the programs are to protect open space, link green corridors together and develop an interconnected system of trails and parks.

History of Trails and Kansas City

Nearly two hundred years ago, the bluffs where Kansas City later rose witnessed the passing of the Lewis and Clark expedition on their epic voyage up the Missouri River. While encamped here at the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers, the members of the Corps of Discovery hunted, made repairs, and corporal punishment was first exercised on two of the men. On June 28, 1804, William Clark hinted in his journal of the great things that would develop at this site, describing present-day downtown Kansas City as “a butifull place for a fort, good landing place...”

After successfully completing their far-reaching explorations of the West, they again passed by here in September of 1806, where despite their eagerness to get home, Lewis and Clark took the time to climb the bluff and admire the commanding view. The historic, watery “trail” of their expedition was only the first of many trails to cross the Kansas City metropolitan area...and to change American History.

Lewis and Clark’s accounts of the vast riches of the West spawned a flood of enterprising fur trappers who crisscrossed the Rocky Mountains in pursuit of both furs and freedom. Their extensive explorations also documented routes that would later be used by the major overland trails. These mountain men used the “trail” of the Missouri River as a superhighway to ship furs to markets all around the world. The fur trade also brought the first permanent settlement in Kansas City when the entrepreneurial Chouteau family of St. Louis established a trading post here in 1821.
That same year a party of five men left Missouri on horseback and headed west to explore trade possibilities with various Indian tribes. Encountering a group of soldiers from Mexico, they were escorted to the small and remote city of Santa Fe. Hungry for new goods, the Mexicans quickly bought out the men’s supplies, earning the Missourians huge profits. With their saddlebags full of silver, and encouraged by the New Mexican government to return, the men hurried home to Missouri with tales of their success.

The next year, more traders with pack animals, and later wagons heavily loaded with trade goods, carved a path across the prairies and down to Mexico. Even greater profits were reaped and the Santa Fe Trail was officially born.

While the original starting points were farther east in Missouri, by the 1830’s Jackson County had established itself as the eastern terminus of the trail, with the new villages of Independence and Westport vying for the lucrative trade. Jackson County was ideally situated to serve in this role, being on America’s western border with the “Indian Lands,” now the State of Kansas, and bounded on the north by the major east-west transportation corridor of the Missouri River. Those two geographical features were responsible for pumping millions of dollars into the regional economy.

Overtime, the Santa Fe Trail left not only a major legacy for Kansas City and Missouri history but in American history as well. It provided a unique overland foreign trade route during an era when nearly all such commerce was conducted with ships from eastern seaboard cities. And it was also the trail used by American troops during the Mexican War in conquering and wresting away from Mexico the entire American Southwest. Through that trail and action, we acquired what is today California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado and Texas - vastly increasing the size and wealth of the United States.

Besides routes of exploration and trade, the Kansas City area also has a rich history of emigration trails. In the spring of 1841, a number of families gathered their covered wagons together at a campground in present-day Johnson County, Kansas to embark on a risky and grueling 2,000-mile trek across the western wilderness. By successfully reaching California, they became the first Americans to migrate across the continent and settle permanently on the Pacific coast.

Pioneers following the trails out of this area to California were few in number compared to those headed to Oregon. That all changed with the discovery of gold in 1848 at the mill of Capt. John Sutter, a former Westport resident, which electrified the nation. Tens of thousands of gold seekers poured into the Kansas City area to outfit themselves for the trip to California, in hopes of making a quick fortune. Few were so lucky, and many returned home broke.
In this area, the California Trail emigrants followed the same route already known as the “Road to Oregon.” In the 1830’s America’s Pacific Northwest, then called the “Oregon Country,” was claimed by both the American and British governments. However, the British actually had a physical presence there with outposts, and felt protected from the encroachment of those upstart young Americans because of the tremendous wall of protection afforded by the Rocky Mountains.

But by the early 1840’s, a handful of Americans proved that thinking to be in error when they successfully crossed the continent and those rugged mountains, and entered the Oregon Country. With the promise of free, rich land, the initial trickle of American emigrants swelled into a mighty flood - all searching for better homes and brighter futures.

Once again, the migrations started from the Kansas City area, and were kicked off in earnest in the spring of 1843 when about 1,000 people left here for the Oregon Country. That initial colony was followed by wave after wave of American settlers, and England’s hold on the region crumbled. As a result, the United States boundary with Canada was established much farther north than where it might have been and we acquired all of what is now Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and part of Montana.

Whether for exploration or trade, fast fortunes or settlement, the trails leading out of the Kansas City region forever changed the size, shape, and destiny of America. Use of these crude pioneer roads made possible America’s acquisition, as well as the settlement and development, of the entire region west of the Rocky Mountains. Through the use of these trails, vast lands were obtained which have helped to pump America’s economy for generations, through farming, ranching, mining precious minerals, fishing, shipping, and the timber and tourist industries, just to name a few.

The ripple effects continue. America’s greatly increased economic clout in the twentieth century also brought increased political and military clout, taking us to new heights of world leadership. The trails across the American West played no small role in opening the door for this series of monumental developments - primitive pioneer trails, winding their way out of the Kansas City area. It is a legacy of towering dimensions.

There is nothing novel about a linked system of parks, parkways, open spaces and greenways in Kansas City. The concept was introduced here 100 years ago when George Kessler, August Meyer, and William Rockhill Nelson convinced Kansas Citians that regional planning and civic design could improve their community. In the 1892-93 Plan proposed by Kessler and Meyer, an integrated network of parks and boulevards was laid out for the young city. The context in which this plan was created, the innova-
tive elements incorporated into the system, and the long-range effects of the plan are well worth considering here, for the spirit and excellence of the 1892-93 Plan provides a sound foundation for future regional plans and investments.

Just as many metropolitan areas are currently recognizing the benefits of greenway development, a handful of booming industrial cities of the late-nineteenth century moved away from the planning of freestanding parks to the development of a park system. This broader approach to park planning allowed for significant conservation of natural features and recognized the fact that the distribution and location of a park system could be manipulated to increase real estate values and to guide development.

Kansas City was ripe for renewal and redirection in the 1890’s. This gateway city straddled the prairie plains, and its centralized and strategic location at the great bend in the Missouri offered tremendous opportunities for growth. The frontier had passed through decades earlier and, in its wake capitalists and urban promoters were jockeying to put Kansas City in control of a vast hinterland. In appearance, however, it was nothing but a regional capital. Its bluffs were covered with shanties, its streets were narrow and clogged with mud, and it bore the austere, treeless, and disordered landscape of an aging frontier center of trade and transshipment.

George Kessler - a landscape architect who had studied civil engineering in his native Germany and who had also worked briefly in New York with Fredrick Law Olmstead and later for the Kansas City, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad Company - arrived in Kansas City at a time when Nelson and others were leading a campaign for more public parks and connecting boulevards. It was the time of the City Beautiful Movement and civic design and planning on a grand scale were beginning to influence the form of the nation’s larger cities. It was also in this context that Kessler submitted, and the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners approved, his parks and boulevard plan for the city.

The early park and boulevard system
The most interesting aspect of the 1892-93 Plan and the subsequent additions to it is that it brought together the design disciplines of architecture, planning, landscape architecture, and urban design. The plan was informed by these influences and the city was shaped by the plan. The result was an integrated network of parks, park structures, architecturally significant buildings, and fashionable boulevards that tied the entire city together and offered a unity of form and arrangement.

Initially conceived as a framework of boulevards that would connect West Terrace Park, Penn Valley Park, and North Terrace Park, the early system displayed a close alignment with the city’s natural features. Boulevards followed ridges and natural waterways and frequently swept across or
broke through the existing city grid. The parks in the system were situated in some of the most rugged and challenging terrain and those that occupied the bluffs overlooking the rivers offered stunning panoramic views unequaled elsewhere in the city.

This use and integration of the area’s outstanding natural features contrasted with the formal elements that Kessler built into his parks and boulevards. In North Terrace Park a stately colonnade stood atop one of the bluffs where below, Cliff Drive hugged the wooded slope and passed under a canopy of trees. Along the Paseo, a series of fountains, pergolas, terraces, and sunken gardens was used to demarcate a chain of tiny parks that ran the nine-block course of the early boulevard. In other places, elegant bridges, reflecting pools, and formal walkways were used to identify parks and boulevards as components of the system.

The 1892-93 Plan still affects the way we see Kansas City, the way we move about, and the way the city continues to grow. The structural effects of the plan are simple - it reoriented Kansas City away from the riverfront and the original downtown. At the same time, as new boulevards and parks were added to the system, it pushed ahead of residential and commercial development and actually guided the city’s growth. In older areas it functioned as a redevelopment tool and in all areas its extension always resulted in increased property values and often, in the creation of beautiful residential districts.

Kessler’s system incorporated rational planning principles. His vision rested on traffic counts, analyses of population distribution, and studies of land values. At the same time that the system made good commercial sense, it also contributed to the preservation of the natural environment within the city and to the beautification of the city through formal design. Most importantly, however, the Kansas City Parks and Boulevard system stand as a model for the creation of connections, for environmental planning on a large scale, and for the linkage of the natural and built environments in an orderly and mutually beneficial way.

The following components comprised the unique plan,

- It outlined a connected system of parks and boulevards that serviced all parts of the expanding city.

- It joined old and new neighborhoods, enhanced communities and sustained property values.

- It contained not only larger parks and boulevards, but also local parks and playgrounds associated with schools, all evenly distributed throughout the city.

- It was forward looking in anticipating growth: in newer areas, land was acquired prior to development in order to provide a framework for urbanization.
• It was backward looking in acknowledging the need for urban renewal: in older areas, acquisitions were made with the intent to clean up blight, remove slums, reclaim disturbed landscapes, and protect major natural features.

• It was primarily oriented toward residential needs, with commercial traffic excluded from the boulevards.

• It was funded through a unique system of benefit districts that the city council was empowered to define, as well as through special assessments against the benefited real estate.

• It was legally adopted by charter amendment, authorizing the acquisition of park and boulevard property by “purchase, condemnation or otherwise” (e.g. by donation).

This astonishingly comprehensive proposal combined environmental protection; natural resource preservation; aesthetics; social ideas for building a stable, balanced, and wholesome community; solutions for transportation problems; and a fair and equitable cost distribution scheme. The plan’s broad appeal and eminent good sense facilitated its comparatively rapid realization, even as other cities’ plans languished.

The 1991 MetroGreen Vision identified a regional greenway system for the Kansas City area. The Vision proposed an interior, primarily urban, loop approximately 90 miles in length and a 140-mile outer loop through suburban areas. The system was envisioned as connecting the two loops with multiple spokes that followed stream courses and existing park lands. The existing urban natural systems and large greenspaces were identified as important features that needed to be incorporated into MetroGreen’s development. The Vision also recognized rural greenspaces as providing significant amounts of open space that feature the region’s natural environment. This included upland prairie, wooded slopes and draws, and streams. Land, currently and formerly, used for agricultural practices was also mentioned for its scenic value and environmental diversity.

In addition to the natural environment described in the document, an extensive examination of human influences on the region was also conducted. The Vision analyzed the development history, heritage and growth of the region. Discovery Centers were identified as important features to incorporate in the MetroGreen system. Discovery Centers were defined as important nodes that highlight the area’s cultural treasures, parks and natural areas, as well as shopping, entertainment and sports venues. Discovery Centers were identified to ensure that economic and educational components were included in the development of the system.

Finally, the 1991 MetroGreen Vision called for the development of an adoptable MetroGreen Master Plan. The Vision specified a Master Plan that is flexible, provides more detailed greenway routes, and is available.
to all levels of government and departments that impact related issues such as flood control and transportation. This 2001 MetroGreen Regional Greenway Initiative is that plan.

Vision

More than one hundred years ago, the Kansas City Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners approved an innovative plan in 1893 by noted planner George Kessler to develop and link together a series of parks, boulevards and greenspaces that would serve Kansas Citians into the Twenty-First Century. In 1991, the American Society of Landscape Architects sponsored a Community Assistance Team to update the Kessler Plan and established a Vision for MetroGreen. This 2001 MetroGreen Regional Greenway Initiative uses the foundations of both the Kessler Plan and the ASLA MetroGreen Vision to define an implementation strategy for the next 100 years. The benefit of creating a comprehensive system of greenspace goes beyond leisure and aesthetics. MetroGreen will be an important element in the future economy and quality of the environment for the Kansas City metropolitan region for years to come. This greenspace system will offer a way to protect the natural green infrastructure of the region’s landscape that is a necessity for maintaining the quality of life that residents have always enjoyed and will continue to desire for years to come. Simply put, the principal vision of MetroGreen is to develop an interconnected network of greenways and open space throughout the seven county metro region.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Preserve and protect stream corridors throughout the metropolitan area

One of the primary goals of MetroGreen is to preserve, protect and restore floodplain lands as vital areas for the absorption of flood waters, thereby helping to reduce economic losses caused by flooding. Also, the MetroGreen system can be part of a clean water program, ensuring that streams, rivers and lakes will support biological diversity and human recreation.

Objectives

To accomplish this goal, the following objectives should be achieved:

• Encourage local communities to adopt ordinances that establish streamside buffers.
• Adopt policies and implement metro-wide programs that serve to maintain floodplains as open, undeveloped landscapes.
• Develop watershed-based strategies for controlling flooding and utilizing greenways as a mitigating landscape feature.
• Decrease non-point source pollution loads on streams, rivers and lakes by implementing Phase 2 of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program.
• Develop a community-wide strategy for protecting undeveloped natural stream corridors.
• Develop a mitigation program to restore and reclaim stream corridors that have been adversely effected by poor land use practices.
• Increase public awareness of water quality issues and concerns.
• Develop and effectively implement proactive efforts to improve water quality involving private citizens through existing and expanded Adopt-A-Stream and storm drain stenciling programs.
• Increase public access to and public ownership of stream corridors.

Goal 2: Link people to outdoor resources close to where they live and work.
MetroGreen corridors should create a diversity of universally accessible landscapes that offer community residents an opportunity to maintain a fit and healthy lifestyle. Through the development of a recreation-based trails system, MetroGreen can also supplement other elements of the community’s transportation program and encourage bicycle and pedestrian connections throughout the metropolitan region.

Objectives
To accomplish this goal, the following objectives should be achieved:
• The orderly expansion of the MetroGreen trails system throughout the region, as shown on an officially adopted MetroGreen Action Plan map should be supported as an important regional initiative. This will ensure that residents have access to a system of trails that can best serve the recreational needs of residents.
• Ensure that MetroGreen corridors are accessible to all persons, regardless of their ability. Utilize the most current national guidelines on outdoor accessibility to define the variety of trail environments and experiences that are available to residents.
• Integrate corporate health care programs into physical development strategies of the greenway system.
• Make greenways a destination for health and fitness activities.
• Provide overland connections as development occurs. Work with developers to ensure that important neighborhood-level connections are successfully developed as part of land development activities.

Goal 3: Link MetroGreen corridors to on-road bicycle and pedestrian facilities to create an interconnected alternative transportation network for non-motorized use.
MetroGreen should be linked to the Mid-America Regional Council long-range transportation plan for on-road bicycle and pedestrian systems offering local residents non-motorized routes for travel to popular destinations such as work and school.

Objectives
To accomplish this goal, the following objectives should be achieved:
• Encourage all local communities to develop bicycle and pedestrian facility plans.
• Ensure that connections are made between the MetroGreen corridors and bicycle and pedestrian routes designated on MARC and local plans.
Goal 4: Provide opportunities for Kansas Citians to learn about the region’s natural landscapes and celebrate their heritage through interpretive programs and cultural facilities located within MetroGreen corridors.

MetroGreen corridors should offer local residents an opportunity to learn about the landscapes that are special to the Kansas City metropolitan region and promote the long-term involvement and participation of community residents in the planning, design, implementation and management of the regional greenway system.

Objectives
To accomplish this goal, the following objectives should be achieved:
- Encourage the establishment of outdoor classrooms to promote environmental education opportunities within greenways.
- Expand education curriculums of primary and secondary schools to include urban geography, social studies, and sciences related to environmental management.
- Develop a program of continuing education for elected officials, agency staff, developers and land designers/engineers to define technologies for managing urban and non-urban stream corridors.
- Establish an “adopt-a-greenway” program to include participation among local business, industry, residential and civic organizations.
- Develop an on-going communication with print, radio and television media. Establish a greenways publication to keep community residents informed of progress. Develop a web site to include updated information on the greenway program.
- Celebrate the area’s special cultural and historic resources through the development of the greenway system.

Goal 5: Protect the native habitat of plants and animals throughout the Metro region.

MetroGreen corridors should be used to preserve and encourage biodiversity through the protection of important and distinctive habitat throughout the community.

Objectives
To accomplish this goal, the following objectives should be achieved:
- Protect and restore aquatic habitat as a primary component of the MetroGreen system.
- Establish streamside vegetative buffers to promote diverse habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species.
- Protect, restore and create wetlands in key riparian corridors to promote wildlife breeding grounds.
Goal 6: Implement the vision of a metropolitan greenspace system first envisioned by George Kessler in 1893, and as articulated in 1991 by the American Society of Landscape Architects.

The Kansas City Metropolitan region should execute an implementation strategy for MetroGreen that is based on public/private partnerships and community participation.

Objectives
To accomplish this goal, the following objectives should be achieved:
- Develop a public-private partnership effort that will further the efforts of MetroGreen development and maintenance goals for the future greenway system.
- Assign responsibilities for facility and land management to appropriate public and private sector organizations and agencies.
- Promote a management philosophy that encourages natural resource stewardship.
- Work with area communities to identify multiple actors as a dedicated source of funding for operation and management activities.
- Encourage local communities to support dedicated maintenance crews for greenway trails.

Goal 7: Make MetroGreen an integral part of a healthy and vibrant economy.

The Kansas City metropolitan region should continue to identify specific economic strategies that will enable MetroGreen to return financial benefits to the region.

Objectives
To accomplish this goal, the following objectives should be achieved:
- Identify partnership opportunities with public sector agencies that can serve to reduce the cost of implementing and managing greenways.
- Identify partnership opportunities with the private sector (businesses, civic organizations, associations and individuals) that can serve to reduce the cost of implementing and managing greenways.
- Provide information to developers and real estate investors, including homeowners, about the value added from proximity to open space and trails.