In 1991, the ASLA was invited to hold its annual meeting in Kansas City. The resulting Community Assistance Team Project produced by the society’s local Prairie Gateway chapter was presented to the community and became a guide for metropolitan greenway development over the next 10 years. It became MetroGreen.

The Mid-America Regional Council served as steward and supporter of the MetroGreen vision during the past decade and local communities began to implement elements of the plan. With growing community interest in trails and increased concerns about stormwater and water quality, MARC launched an effort in 2001 to expand the 1991 vision plan.

As an expansion of the 1991 ASLA plan, MetroGreen promotes a comprehensive and extensive system of greenways, trails and open spaces. MetroGreen 2001 defines the critical relationship between environmental stewardship and urban growth management. The plan also articulates a future development strategy that will be based on the cooperative efforts of the seven counties and the municipal governments included within the plan.

MetroGreen proposes preservation and restoration of important natural streamways and environmental resources; auto-alternative travel for area residents commuting from home to work or school; it heightens awareness of recreation facilities throughout the region and improves access to them; it unifies the seven counties in the metropolis; and it connects economic, cultural and historic destinations throughout the region.

MetroGreen enlarges upon George Kessler’s greenprint and the 1991 ASLA vision, adding connections leading from existing city boulevards, trails and greenways to trails, parks, and historic, cultural and recreational centers. The result will be a system of corridors and open space that will enhance the environment, offer alternative modes of travel and by connecting communities, promote their cohesive interaction.
A Regional Greenprint

This MetroGreen Regional Greenway Initiative provides a greenprint for a metropolitan system joining urban and rural green corridors throughout the seven-county Kansas City region. The plan is designed to protect and improve water quality in the region for the next 100 years, and to protect and enhance the region’s existing natural elements, and the quality of life area residents cherish.

- MetroGreen will preserve and protect stream corridors in the seven-county Kansas City area by helping to use floodplain lands to absorb floodwaters, thus reducing economic loss. A clean water initiative, MetroGreen is designed to support the biological diversity of streams, rivers and lakes. The plan specifies waterways to be used for recreational purposes; offers watershed strategies for flood control and for protecting natural stream corridors; recommends local adoption of streamside buffer zones; and restores native habitats for indigenous plants and animals.

- MetroGreen will link destinations including home/school and home/work. Green corridors available for walking and biking enhance other public health initiatives by broadening opportunities for area residents to lead healthy lifestyles. The orderly expansion of trail corridors will increase transport options and serve citizens’ recreational needs.

- MetroGreen is designed to provide off-road corridors that are linked to form an alternative transportation network connecting the seven-county region. MetroGreen will promote non-motorized travel options and expand non-motorized routes.

- MetroGreen will make it possible for residents throughout the seven-county region to experience the beauty of natural landscapes. The plan envisages outdoor classrooms to promote environmental education in the areas of urban geography, social studies and environmental management. In addition, MetroGreen proposes interpretive programs that celebrate cultural facilities located within its corridors. MARC will provide a web site that will offer area residents with updated information on MetroGreen’s progress.

- In addition, MetroGreen will support ways to protect and restore native habitats for indigenous plants and animals.

- MetroGreen will encourage the development of public/private partnerships to make practical decisions concerning the construction and maintenance of future greenways. Among MetroGreen’s primary goals is to identify specific economic strategies that will define the plan as a prime component of a healthy and vibrant regional economy. MetroGreen will identify partnership opportunities with private sector businesses, civic organizations, associations and individuals to spread the cost of implementing and managing greenways, and will concentrate on cost savings associated with greenway development.
MetroGreen’s energetic, visionary greenprint will propel the Kansas City region into the vanguard of America’s forward-looking, environmentally aware metropolitan areas.

After 10 years as the steward and primary supporter of the MetroGreen Vision, MARC obtained the services of a planning team to take the 1991 Vision to the next level of refinement. The planning team was comprised of Greenways Incorporated, Patti Banks Associates, ETC Institute/Leisure Vision, and the Trust for Public Land. The MetroGreen system defined in this plan has been developed from four primary sources of information: the ASLA MetroGreen Vision of 1991, the Geographic Information System (or GIS) resources of local governments, public involvement and input from municipal and county officials.

Community members and municipal and county officials provided input in three primary forms. Community involvement included:

- a series of public workshops held throughout the Kansas City region to educate community members about their local greenway systems (existing and planned) and the benefits of a regional greenway system as well as to receive their input regarding possible future greenway corridors;

- the technical expertise of the MetroGreen Technical Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from area municipal planning and parks and recreation departments, other local agencies, and non-profit organizations;

- and, the MetroGreen Civic Alliance that involved area civic leaders to gain the perspective and guidance from the private sector.

In addition to the personal involvement of citizens and staff from around the region, geographic information system (GIS) data files were collected from MARC and area communities. The GIS files were used to produce working maps of the region and a final digital map of the MetroGreen system that will be returned to the communities. Sharing the final MetroGreen system map will ensure the coordination of future greenway development in neighboring communities and that the maximum benefit of a regional system can be enjoyed by all.

As the MetroGreen system emerged, greater specificity was needed to support the comprehensive nature of the plan, thus ensuring that a buildable system was being planned. Efforts to broaden the Initiative included the development of MetroGreen Design Guidelines, a finance strategy to identify possible funding sources for the design and construction of the system, and a random sampling household survey of community members to understand the most important goals and gauge the support for the development of a regional greenway system. Throughout the process, the MARC Board of Directors was kept abreast of the activities and progress of MetroGreen.
MetroGreen is a visionary, large-scale system of interconnected landscape corridors that will span more than 1,000 miles linking city to countryside, suburb to urban center, and regional residents to the landscapes they cherish. To achieve the vision articulated in 1991 by the ASLA Prairie Gateway Chapter, MetroGreen will become more than a system of trails and bike paths. MetroGreen will seek to conserve the unique native landscapes of the Kansas City region, and will help resolve the relationship between land development and land stewardship, defining a greenprint for the future.

The concept of MetroGreen is simple, link together corridors of land to the landscapes and destinations that people value. Where appropriate, build pathways that people can travel by foot, bicycle, rollerblade or on horseback. And make the corridors wide enough so that they will help to protect water courses, preserve historic landscapes, and beautify area roadways.

Implementation of MetroGreen will be complex. Full build-out of the system envisioned in this Regional Greenway Initiative will require a coordinated effort by the local governments, private interests and residents of the seven-county region.

This plan responds to concerns that were expressed in the citizen survey conducted by MARC in 2001, and promotes a systematic, thorough and highly implementable set of strategies for shaping the future of the Kansas City region through the 21st Century. Once this is achieved, the work begun by George Kessler in 1892, and further articulated by the ASLA in 1991, will be fully evident to future residents of the Kansas City region in 2102.

The MetroGreen Regional Greenway Initiative is a comprehensive, visionary plan that identifies potential greenway corridors throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area and proposes specific action steps to establish these greenways with a timeframe of three-to-five, five-to-fifteen, and fifteen-to-twenty-five year increments. To realize the vision laid forth in this plan, the following steps will need to be completed for each greenway corridor: land protection, master planning, design development, construction, and maintenance.

Implementing the region-wide concept of MetroGreen will take place at the county and municipal government level. This is not to suggest that local governments alone are to bear the entire burden of implementation. This plan envisions an active role for the Mid-America Regional Council and a partnership effort between the public and private sector to implement the MetroGreen vision.
MetroGreen needs an organization that is dedicated to the vision, mission, goals and objectives of this Plan in order to be successful in the long run. The implementation of the MetroGreen plan will require one or more organizations with the ability to:

- Advocate, promote, and encourage development of MetroGreen.
- Engage and educate citizens as to benefits of MetroGreen.
- Assist in raising money for implementation.
- Help to organize volunteers to assist with implementation and management.
- Sponsor or co-sponsor MetroGreen events.
- Serve as champion for the MetroGreen Regional Greenway Initiative.
- Advise local governments on specific segments of the MetroGreen Regional Greenway Initiative.
- Facilitate cooperation among jurisdictions for implementation of MetroGreen.
- Promote use of uniform design guidelines for MetroGreen facilities.

The Mid-America Regional Council has taken responsibility for updating and refining the MetroGreen plan, building support among local government leaders and building community awareness. As a voluntary association of city and county governments and metropolitan planning organization, MARC views the MetroGreen planning function as an appropriate role for the agency. This role has been viewed as appropriate by member local governments and other MetroGreen stakeholders. In the near term, the Mid-America Regional Council will absorb the immediate planning and implementation efforts of MetroGreen under its existing organizational structure. This is viewed as a short-term solution to the issue of leadership.

The framework for a long-term organization structure includes the formation of a new organization called MetroGreen, Incorporated. It would be established as a non-profit, 501 (c)3 organization. Under the name MetroGreen, Inc., the organization would be governed by a Board of Directors and have its own administrative staff. Under this scenario, MetroGreen, Inc., could have the following divisions. One would be administrative and oriented toward implementation, the other, a “friends” group, would be oriented toward advocacy, promotion and fund raising.

MetroGreen, Inc. (Leadership Board)
- Champion the MetroGreen Regional Greenway Initiative
- Advise local governments on the development of the MetroGreen Regional Greenway Initiative
- Facilitate cooperation among jurisdictions for implementation of MetroGreen
- Define and recommend sources of funding for MetroGreen
- Implement uniform design guidelines for MetroGreen facilities
- Coordinate efforts to create a unified MetroGreen system
Friends of MetroGreen
- Subset of MetroGreen, Inc.
- Membership organization
- Advocate, promote, and encourage development of MetroGreen
- Educate citizens as to the benefits of MetroGreen
- Assist MetroGreen in raising money for implementation
- Help to organize volunteers to assist with implementation and management
- Sponsor or co-sponsor MetroGreen events