PROJECT DESCRIPTION:
The Benton Community Garden replaced a formerly overgrown lot at the intersection of Linwood and Benton Boulevards with a beautiful sustainable space. In 2010, the Santa Fe Area Council and the KC Hope Center started discussing ways to improve this corner. Local nonprofit organizations, Historic Green and the Central Plains Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) worked with the area residents to organize a design competition, get funding for the project and construct the winning design.

More than 80 community members participated in planting the garden in one day, with additional community support for planting days in 2012 and 2013. This project provides green space and examples of sustainable practices in an intersection with heavy through traffic. The garden uses native plants, recycled mulch, a rain garden, low-carbon concrete, rain water storage irrigation and recycled wood structures.

PROJECT GOALS:
• Reduce blight and create a community space with potential health and economic benefits.
• Provide opportunities for unskilled participants to learn about green construction practices from industry experts.
• Create an opportunity for community members to participate in a dialogue about sustainable living.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS AND LESSONS LEARNED:
Throughout this process, Historic Green learned to address liability and maintenance concerns of community partners — for example, the garden was developed on private property owned by KC Hope Center, but is generally operated by the community and open to the public. After receiving formal legal advice and organizing individual partner meetings, strategies were developed to resolve these issues. A sign listing the “rules of the garden” mitigates liability for KC Hope Center. Also, KC Hope Center and the area council provide a small stipend to neighborhood youth for day-to-day maintenance of the garden in the summer, and agreements have been established with the Urban Rangers and MU’s Missouri Extension program for ongoing maintenance.

Skilled sustainable designers and builders working with community members provided rich learning opportunities. The garden provides a highly visible investment at a critical neighborhood intersection. Educational work also brought a diverse group of citizens together for a common cause.

FUNDING SOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS:
The project was initially funded through a grant awarded by Keep Kansas City Beautiful to the Santa Fe Area Council, with additional funding from the USGBC. Private partners donating time, materials and expertise include: Kiewit Engineers; JE Dunn; LaFarge Cement; Ochsner Hare and Hare; Pratt Industries; and BRR Architects. In 2013, USGBC received an $18,000 grant from the KC Community Capital Fund, supplemented with more than $3,000 raised in a crowdfunding campaign.

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