Abstract

Change occurs in places, not in plans.

Greater Kansas City’s proposal to launch Creating Sustainable Places is designed to lead our region from planning to action — to turn the plans that voice our ideals into the places that demonstrate them.

Our region shares a vision of achieving sustainability through creation of vibrant, green and connected centers and corridors. This framework emerged from an extensive visioning process, Imagine KC, which took place over 18 months in 2008–09 and engaged some 80,000 residents. The region began its journey toward this vision in 1999 with an initiative called Creating Quality Places, whose goal was to encourage the bistate region’s 120 cities and nine counties to shape future development in ways that would maintain and enhance its high quality of life. While the emphasis of this early work was on community design, it yielded 20 principles for quality places that bear a remarkable resemblance to today’s livability principles. The CQP principles call for diverse neighborhoods with multiple housing options, vibrant mixed-use commercial areas and efficient transportation systems — all within a healthy natural environment.

With more than 10 years of planning in this framework, the region is ready and uniquely qualified to move to the next stage — Creating Sustainable Places. The regional planning council (MARC), small and large communities, and numerous stakeholders have collaborated on a wide variety of plans that address in detail the fundamental elements of livability, including transportation choices, environmental health, social equity, housing affordability, neighborhood preservation, community health, and economic competitiveness. The next step is to integrate these components by applying them to specific centers and corridors.

Greater Kansas City is a low-density, low-cost, and slow growth region, which impedes the pace of change toward sustainable development. The logic of this proposal’s model advocates a planning approach that addresses these traits and will transfer to other communities in the Midwest and across the United States that share these characteristics. Creating Sustainable Places will do three things to move this region from planning to implementation:

1. **Organize for Success**

   Creating Sustainable Places will build on our strong track record of civic collaboration and establish a coordinating committee whose members will include leadership from local governments and critical content areas working with private sector development partners, universities, researchers and neighborhood representatives, including the traditionally underrepresented. The committee will provide regional leadership on sustainable development; will oversee the work of this grant; will direct outreach and education activities; and will monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the grant and this
work. This committee will coordinate a series of focused work groups and will continue to provide leadership and coordination to sustainable development long after the grant period.

Organizing for success includes broadening public understanding and stakeholder capacity through robust engagement and education initiatives:

- **Imagine KC** — an innovative partnership between MARC and KCPT Public Television producing a series of television broadcasts about creating sustainable places and engaging residents in dialogue on their role in making such places possible
- The **Academy for Sustainable Communities** — enhancing the region’s premier program to offer cutting-edge ideas and practical solutions for sustainable development through training and workshops for local government officials, planners and other stakeholders in the region
- A strong national and local partnership to engage underrepresented populations in the creation of sustainable places.

2. **Enhance Decision Making**

To make sound decisions about investments that facilitate sustainable development, local leaders and communities need new tools, practices and policies. *Creating Sustainable Places* will develop the following tools and capacities to accelerate sustainable development:

- A **Sustainable Places Toolbox**, containing key elements:
  - Visualization tool to help the community imagine how it could develop differently
  - Sustainable Development Pro Forma that measures financial flows, sustainability and fiscal impact on local governments, and helps developers who believe mixed-use projects “just don’t work in our region” envision applications appropriate to local markets
  - Repositioning the existing Natural Resources Inventory from a catalog of resources to a green infrastructure decision-making framework for local communities
  - Redeveloping underused and failing retail centers/malls through analysis and a model for redevelopment of these sites
  - Focused Tools to incorporate healthy lifestyles, walkability, arts and culture, neighborhood development codes and other key elements into the development of sustainable places.
- A region-wide housing capacity system, implementing a plan to address housing affordability and equity and to increase capacity for planning, financing and production.
- An expanded workforce intelligence system incorporating job access into a regional system that links workforce training to growing economic sectors.

3. **Demonstrate New Models**

The tools that the region develops will be applied to six major transportation corridors and key demonstration projects. The six corridors form the heart of the region’s system of centers and corridors. The application of sustainable development tools to these corridors, five of which are already major TIGER Bus Rapid Transit corridors, will create powerful transit-oriented development demonstrations and will provide the basis for further investment in these corridors and others to which they connect. The grant will also demonstrate in other settings, such as the Green Impact Zone and rural town centers, how sustainable development can transform the ways these neighborhoods and communities grow and develop.