

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Barriers and Bridges

September 19, 2013

The two crucial keys to creating healthy communities are both simple to define and difficult to accomplish: flexible zoning that allows for creative, non-traditional use of space and funding for multi-use projects.

On September 19, Barriers and Bridges, the first in a ULI Minnesota series of discussions about building better, healthier communities, looked at local projects and initiatives that include a focus on healthy living. Although the panelists' projects and experiences were different in a number of ways, they and those in the audience agreed that unyielding zoning restrictions and difficulty finding financing limited their ability to get outside the box.

Policy, System and Environmental Changes

Hennepin County created the position of healthy community planning manager in 2006, bringing public health and planning together in an official way, said Karen Nikolai, who holds the position. "Health is now a part of the conversations in Public Works," she said. Nikolai said Hennepin County and local communities have started doing quite a bit to encourage healthy living, creating opportunities for residents to walk and bicycle easily.

[See presentation](#)

Creative Placemaking

MSP is far ahead of other places in creative placemaking—"building better and healthier communities through the arts," said Heidi Kurtze, vice president for properties for Artspace, a national nonprofit headquartered in Minneapolis that builds living and work spaces for artists. About a dozen of its 34 projects now in operation are in Minnesota.

Marc Asmus, the architect for the Artspace homes in Green Homes North and partner in Hive Modular, launched the conversation about zoning restrictions. His original designs for the four homes were too narrow, according to the zoning for that area. The original design would have allowed more light in each of the homes, which in turn would have meant less energy use—and would be better for visual artists. But, Asmus said, "There are lot of ideas architects and developers have that can't always be used because of zoning."

[See Presentation.](#)

Financing Outside the Box

The Cornerstone Group <http://www.tcgmn.com> is hoping to create a new community center for Richfield that will include housing (affordable and market-rate), retail and public spaces on the site of what was Lyndale Garden Center <http://www.lyndalegardens.com>, according to Colleen Carey, president, but it's been difficult assembling the financing for a project that includes so many different elements.

Lyndale Gardens is expected to have 151 units of housing (apartments and townhomes), a farmers' market, a natural foods grocery, performing space, an outdoor pizza oven, public art and easy connection to walking trails. Cornerstone has received a

\$1.5 million grant from the Metropolitan Council to help create the public spaces that will make the area a real, connected community.

[See Presentation.](#)

Just Walk

Jay Walljasper, senior fellow and editor, On the Commons, said one activity can save \$1 billion each year in healthcare costs and make for happier, healthier people: “It’s easy, enjoyable and virtually free—taking a walk,” he said. “Walking for as little as 30 minutes a day can have significant health benefits.”

http://www.everybodywalk.org/media_assets/EBW_WALKING_REVOLUTION.pdf