

topeka

sustainability 101 energy | industry | community

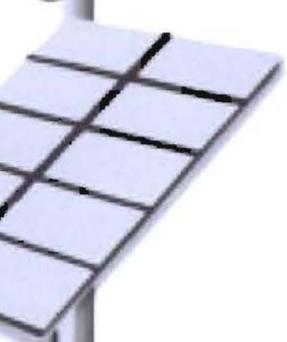
Creating a Sustainable Midwest City

Honors Creative Project
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Creating a Sustainable Midwest City

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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abstract

This creative project is an education piece in sustainable urban and community design for Topeka, Indiana, a small rural town situated in Northern Indiana. A team of students and professors from Ball State University's College of Architecture and Planning and the Community Based Projects outreach program created the community design. Topeka approached the CBP in 2008, desiring a progressive vision for the future of their community, seeing the decline of their existing urban fabric, industrial core, and looking ahead to the potentials for more sustainable design.

CBP hosted a charrette, an intense 3-day design visioning with heavy community interaction in November 2008. The charrette was different from past charrettes the CBP has performed in its focus on the entire scope of sustainable development-energy, industry, and community-as its inspiration. One uniting vision was prepared through focusing on these three key pieces. This vision represents a community that is rich in the quality of life it provides for its residents.

This website and the vision the CBP drew from the ideas and creations of the people of Topeka is divided into four parts:

1. A section about sustainability-basic facts, what we deal with today, and how to change that.
2. Energy information, primarily dealing with how Topeka currently gets its energy, and how that could be shifted to renewable integration in the future.
3. Industry and economic catalysts-how to create new jobs in growing industries from the current expertise held by the workforce.
4. Community designs and ideas in how to capitalize on the interaction of the people of the town while making it equitable for all.

acknowledgments

I would like to thank my many advisors and councilors on this project, including Professors Bruce Race, Lohren Deeg, and John Motloch, but most of all my advisor, Scott Truex. Without their guidance and prodding for further exploration, this would not have been possible.

author's statement

In today's world, urban planning and development has become one of the most preeminent industries in securing our society's future. Urban planning advocates a holistic, designed approach to solving the complex problems we encounter as a result of human degradation of the biosphere. As our economies have grown grossly out of proportion in the past century, our attention to design and business with nature has turned to design without and business against nature. This exploitation of resources and pollution resulting from our industriousness has led to global challenges of ever-growing severity: climate change, overpopulation, famine, health and disease, and natural disasters have increased more and more as we have raped the environment for our own personal and societal gain. Our sprawling suburbs and polluting factories have reduced our lives to living in the isolation of a car to move between the different uses of our lives.

One of the key parts to urban planning's reunion between the environment and economics is the integration of the community and social equity to balance the triple bottom line of sustainability. Community involvement is done through surveys, neighborhood meetings, and design charrettes. With Topeka, all of these were critical parts to their visioning process outlined in this project, but most of all was the emphasis of the charrette. French for, "on the cart," a design charrette is an intense design experience spanning two or three days and rendering entire redesigns of a community. It is conducted by an outside source, Ball State University's Community Based Projects venture in this case, and integrates the people of the community continually into the process. This experience is a vital piece to a community "owning" their design and advocating for the betterment of themselves.

This project is the result of a charrette in Topeka, Indiana. A small Midwest America town, complete with farming, industry (RVs and manufactured homes), and the "small town" feel that is come to be expected from Indiana's cornfields. There is also a significant Amish presence in the town, lending to many cottage industries and an unusually large amount of sustainable lifestyles already in existence.

Charrettes are typically presented upon their finish at some community-gathering event. Afterward, CBP staff prepares reports and presentations for the community to take to developers and designers in the implementation phase. The challenge of this creative project was to enhance those reports and presentations with the emerging media given us by the Internet. The goal was to harness the power of social media and the World Wide Web to expand the limitations of hard copied reports and one-to-one presentations to limitless bounds. The Internet serves as a functional tool in expanding the traditional vertical dissemination of information (peer-to-peer, etc.) to a horizontal presentation, effectively allowing hundreds or thousands to access and learn, ideate, and inform themselves based upon the content communicated.

This project represents a semester's worth of work in graphic, web, and communications design to achieve this goal in a succinct manner. The content and drawings come directly from the charrette and the people of Topeka's feedback as it happened. It is hoped that by harnessing this media tool, it can be used to supplement already existing technologies for greater communication in the future.

The site is accessed by opening the file, index.htm in a web browser on your computer.

bibliography of inspiration

The works used to create this presentation include the summation of classes in the College of Architecture and Planning, most heavily PLAN 261, CAP 498, LA 471, and PLAN 404.

All other works cited for the supplementary papers in this project appear with the respective work.