

Green *and* Growing

*Capital Region is building better
with greater cooperation*

BY JOHN IMES



A key challenge for Dane County and the surrounding region is how to accommodate a fast-growing population and the need for sustained economic vitality and growth. Creating more sustainable homes, neighborhoods, cities, villages and towns will be essential to protecting and enhancing our quality of life.



Cannery Square is one of several residential projects in Dane County that incorporates the principles of New Urbanism and Green Built-certified homes. Retail, green space, parks, interconnected streets, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks and a mix of housing types makes these developments appealing at an affordable price.

We can preserve and enhance the quality of our lakes, streams, recreational opportunities and the productivity of prime agricultural lands by investing in well-located green-built development. What is green-built? Simply put, it is development designed at a modest scale, for real longevity, with materials that are reused and reusable, and designed to minimize energy, water use and pollution.

In this issue of Making Green Sense, we look at the “Not So Big House” and its emphasis on quality over quantity, and building more comfortable, durable, beautiful (and environmentally responsible) places to live. Next, we look at green urbanism and the creation of more compact, efficient and walkable neighborhoods. And finally, we highlight regional cooperation as key to promoting economic development and finding innovative ways to protect our quality of life.

Housing trend: “Not So Big” coming into style?

The size of the average American home has grown significantly over the years, from about 1,500 square feet in 1970 to more than 2,400 square feet today. However, that growth rate is stabilizing due in part to Gen Xers who want amenities over bigger spaces and empty-nesters who want to downsize. Moreover, a 2004 nationwide survey conducted by the National Association

of Home Builders shows only 37 percent of homeowners would choose a bigger house with fewer amenities over a smaller house with high-quality products and amenities. Concerns about increasing fuel and utility bills are also a factor for folks who want better, not bigger, homes.

In her best selling book, *The Not So Big House: A Blueprint for the Way We Really Live*, Sarah Susanka describes the art of building better: “To take out square footage that’s seldom used, so that you can put the money saved into the detail, craft and character that will make it eminently comfortable and uniquely yours. In short, it favors quality over quantity.” Susanka stresses multifunctional uses, room height variety and interior views to help improve the quality of spaces by making them cozier, light-filled, welcoming and exciting places to be.

While the “Not So Big House” focus on quality may sound tempting, optimizing a home’s design also reduces the building’s surface area and materials used, which can lead to huge savings in energy use and waste. Moreover, by building better and giving careful thought to living space and your specific needs, you’ll save money which can be used for upgrades in craftsmanship and other amenities.

Finally, homes that incorporate energy-efficient design, durable materials, quality finishes and beautiful craftsmanship are more likely to be taken care of by their owners. One only needs to travel to Europe to appreciate the beauty and sustainability of buildings built centuries ago — built to last and mindful of future generations.

Not so Big meets green urbanism

Decisions we make today about how we grow will affect the natural environment and quality of life for generations to come. Policy makers, leading builders and citizens increasingly are coming together to find better ways to build more sustainable neighborhoods.

For instance, Veridian Homes, the state’s largest home builder, is a leader in creating affordable, Green Built-certified, New Urbanist-inspired developments that feature interconnected streets, a town center with stores and other conveniences, green space and a mix of housing types, including

homes, condos and townhouses in a pedestrian-oriented design.

Grandview Commons on Madison’s far east side and Smith’s Crossing in Sun Prairie are two popular New Urbanist neighborhoods. Cannery Square, another Veridian project, is redeveloping old industrial land located in downtown Sun Prairie into 15 acres of housing units and various urban shops and offices.

Hilldale Mall, Madison’s first suburban mall, is also undergoing a New Urbanist revival with new townhouses, parking ramps, a main street and other amenities to create an urban oasis in what was an old parking lot.

Thinking regionally

During a recent fact-finding trip to Denver, I saw one example of what greater cooperation and “thinking regionally” might look like: Lots of new construction and green development located near and around major transit and transportation corridors.

Denver’s integrated regional transit system features light rail, commuter rail and rapid bus transit services. By encouraging the clustering of new homes and businesses around transportation hubs, policy makers have reduced infrastructure costs, helped relieve neighborhood traffic congestion and created more jobs and affordable housing opportunities for residents.

Here in Dane County, the Collaboration Council, comprised of business leaders, educators, government and nonprofit organizations, is learning from Denver’s

regional cooperation efforts as it puts together its plan to promote the region and help guide its growth.

Thinking regionally will also require careful planning with residents to determine their vision for the community and what redevelopment looks like and how it functions. By combining the use of pioneering visual simulation tools with Internet access, policy makers can more effectively communicate with and engage the public, particularly the large segment who are interested in participating, but can’t make it to meetings.

We can keep Dane County green and growing by creating more livable homes and neighborhoods and cooperating across the Capital Region. By working together, we can also ensure a more sustainable, affordable and livable quality of life. ■

Green-it-yourself resources

- Sarah Susanka, AIA, *The Not So Big House*. www.notsobighouse.com
- The Pattern Language, Christopher Alexander. www.patternlanguage.com
- 1000 Friends of Wisconsin. www.1kfriends.org
- Nolen to Now: Neighborhood Design for a Sustainable Region. nolenconference.org/
- Cannery Square. www.cannerysquare.com
- Collaboration Council of Dane County. www.collaborationcouncil.com
- Congress for the New Urbanism. www.cnu.org
- Traditional Neighborhood Design Home Plans. www.tndhomes.com
- Urban Land Institute. www.uli.org
- Use the Green Built Home™ program and online resources. The Green Built Home Remodeling Checklist has over 330 ideas to save money, protect our natural resources and improve your family’s health, safety and comfort. To learn more about Green Built Home visit www.greenbuilthome.org



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