



Sustainable Growth and
Development
Salina, KS

Next Steps Memorandum
June 2012



Sustainable Communities Building Blocks

Sustainable Design + Development for the City of Salina, KS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) selected the city of Salina, KS for Sustainable Communities Building Blocks technical assistance focused on identifying smart growth approaches to incorporating mixed income housing, redevelopment and revitalization for the distressed neighborhood of North Salina. This technical assistance focused in on several smaller subareas within the North Salina neighborhood and exploring sustainable design concepts to support these broader community goals.

This memorandum describes the Sustainable Design and Development Workshop held in March 29-30, 2012, and focuses on the outcomes of the workshop and recommended next steps that the community can take to advance key smart growth goals. EPA Contractors Alan Steinbeck, AICP and Alexander Bell, AICP of Renaissance Planning Group led the technical assistance effort in partnership with City staff, representatives of North Salina Community Development, Inc. (NSCD) and representatives of EPA Region 7.

The information in this memorandum is accompanied by a list of reference documents, which are listed in the Appendix.

2. KEY STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

Participants identified and prioritized the strengths and weaknesses of the existing North Salina neighborhood, with an emphasis on Broadway Boulevard from North Street to Pacific Avenue and 9th Street from Pacific Avenue to Interstate 70. The discussion during the Day 1 evening session resulted in the identification of the following:

Primary Strengths:

- There are many opportunities for development given amount of vacant land, underutilized sites or abandoned buildings.
- There is a significant amount of public infrastructure with additional capacity available.
- There is good accessibility to the area and it is proximate to downtown.
- There is a sense of community and neighborhood identity, and people tend to know each other.
- There is a community/civic mindset (within North Salina and citywide) prepared to make good things happen.

Secondary Strengths:

- It is a gateway to the city from the north and east.
- The area is established and has a history.
- Major arterials serve the area.
- There is flexibility in how to shape the future of the area.

Primary Weaknesses:

- There is a lack of retail and services, including a grocery store or banking opportunities.
- There is a lack of public services and facilities, including a fire station, elementary school and park space within the neighborhood area.
- There is a negative perception of the area in general.
- Diverse property ownership makes it difficult to assemble and develop property.

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- Visual appeal is poor in some areas due to aging commercial and residential properties and lack of upkeep.

Secondary Weaknesses

- There is a high percentage of rental property in the area, much of which has owners and tenants who have been reluctant in the past to participate in efforts to improve the area.
- There are a significant number of distressed properties.
- Incentives for redevelopment are lacking.
- There is a lack of understanding of the possibilities of change and some degree of fear of change.
- The flood plain presents challenges and potential limitations for development and existing uses south of the Interstate.

3. Key Sustainable Design and Development Opportunities

Based on the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the study area and an exploration of different development goals and concepts, participants identified key smart growth and green building design principles that were most relevant to the community and rated them in order of importance as follows:

Most relevant Ten Principles of Smart Growth (in order of importance):

1. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
2. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
3. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
4. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.
5. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.

Most relevant Six Principles of Green Buildings (in order of importance):

1. Protect and conserve water.
2. Use environmentally preferable and safer building products and services.
3. Conserve materials and resources.
4. Protect ecosystems and enhance communities.
5. Promote healthy indoor environments.

With these broader key principles in mind, the study team and workshop participants identified several policy, program or project oriented recommendations for the three neighborhood areas selected for more detailed discussion: Subarea 1 - 9th Street from I-70 to Pacific Avenue, Subarea 2 - “Five Corners” intersection and adjacent areas, and Subarea Site 3 - Broadway Boulevard from Pacific Avenue to North Street. The following summarizes the key ideas generated for each subarea. Included as appendices are key maps and illustrations generated from the workshop.

Subarea 1 - 9th Street

- Gateway landscape features should be installed at the interstate interchange to create a sense of welcome or arrival into the community. Installation can be trees and perennials with low water usage and low maintenance requirements. Installation should complement the gateway lighting feature.

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- The hotel at the southwest corner of the interchange will be redeveloped. A definitive strategy for site development that is appropriate in the flood zone needs to be developed for this site along with the truck stop on the other side of 9th Street.
- Existing creeks present an opportunity for more formalized flood control measures, utilizing both traditional and innovative green infrastructure strategies. Pilot projects or best practice demonstration projects can be developed (e.g. pervious pavement, rain gardens, and other water capturing landscape features such as swales) for these locations.
- The mobile home sales site can be converted to another use. Given that it is in the floodplain, it is not well suited for redevelopment. The site could be converted to a collection point for activity that expands on existing park and public land (e.g. active or passive park space, parking, farmers market, community garden, orchard, plant sale area, or trail head).
- The public and natural areas on the north end of 9th Street should be connected to areas south by a multi-use trail allowing better access for biking and walking.
- The levy trail should be extended to create a more extensive trail loop or system and should be connected to the neighborhoods to the south via a multi-use trail. Trail parking for levy trail should be institutionalized.
- There is the potential for expanding the public tree nursery as park, orchard or additional park space.
- There is the potential for wind or solar energy generation in the floodplain area. Feasibility needs to be further investigated.
- New mixed use development should frame the gateway into the neighborhood district of the city in the area Euclid Avenue.
- South of Euclid Avenue there exist vacant parcels and some sites with redevelopment potential as mixed use buildings, although the existing character is predominately single family housing. Keeping and reinforcing the residential character between Euclid and Pacific with low to moderate density housing and some residential supporting retail should be considered. Ownership transformation from rental units to owner occupied homes on 9th would improve the ability to coordinate improvements and maintain public and private areas.
- 9th Street (and perhaps others) should have a porch program or porch ordinance to encourage this architectural detail and building form. Many of the historic homes in the community have front porches which add a great deal to the character of the street.
- The existing street tree canopy on 9th Street south of Euclid should be reinforced with new plantings. A tree canopy preservation program could be coupled with landscape and façade enhancements for existing businesses and residences along 9th street to further strengthen a strong sense of place and inviting streetscapes.

Subarea 2 - Five Corners

- The intersection of Five Corners area presents an opportunity for a roundabout. A roundabout would be possible, but would require property acquisition on the southeast corner. The current pavement area is not adequate for a roundabout that can also accommodate truck traffic and there is no set of alternative truck routes for the City. Despite the challenges to implementing a roundabout, the balance of volumes of the approaches and the fact that they are all two through lanes makes the intersection ideal for a roundabout given other community goals. A roundabout

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would reduce delay in the peak and off peak, reduce energy use and present an opportunity for aesthetic improvements to the intersection.

- The several blocks south of Broadway, west of 9th, north of Grand and east of 11th are an opportunity for mixed use catalyst redevelopment projects. The block that consists of the park and the new residential project can be framed with new buildings in the adjacent blocks. While the industrial uses would have to find another home, reestablishing this area as neighborhood is an important step in creating a stronger sense of place for the immediate area and creating a seamless connection and gateway from North Salina to downtown.
- In the immediate area of the intersection, two to three story developments are appropriate.
- The gateway corridor from the interstate to downtown comes through Five Corners area. Basic directional signage would improve wayfinding. Pacific to Santa Fe and 9th to Elm or Ash are both viable options for creating a seamless streetscape connection to downtown. Doing so requires the adaptive reuse of existing buildings, infill with new buildings that fit in with the character and scale of the neighborhood, additional landscaping, lighting, signage, etc. A living wall, perhaps on an abandoned structure, would add interest as well.
- North/south bicycle travel needs to be accommodated, including through the Five Corners area. There is room on 9th south of Pacific for bicycle lanes. The segment north on 9th is important in connecting the neighborhood to the existing (and future) parks, trails and natural areas. An on road bicycle lane can be put on 9th if implemented in concert with a road diet approach to slow traffic and reduce travel lanes. One approach could be to convert the section to two lanes in each direction with a shared turn lane or median. The on street bike lanes could connect to off road multi-use trail north of Euclid.

Subarea 3 - Broadway Boulevard

- The long term prospect for this area is to remain part industrial and part commercial. From a community development perspective, areas east of 13th Street should emphasis neighborhood commercial uses, leaving areas west of 13th Street to remain for larger commercial and light industrial uses.
- As a result of the side street realignment project, there is an opportunity to landscape and otherwise improve the vestigial property at intersections. Streetscape improvements, in particular trees, would go a long way in improving the road aesthetically. Rather than having a formal continuous streetscape, the left over property can be used.

4. KEY ACTIONS/ TIMEFRAMES/ RESPONSIBILITIES

Note: These actions steps reflect ideas generated from the workshop process. The pursuit of these actions is fully at the discretion of the local participants and the communities they represent and serve.

The following strategies and actions represent a combination actions identified by workshop participants along with options for consideration from EPA on best strategies for moving forward. These next steps are listed in sequential order to provide a relative timeline for when the actions should occur.

1. Continue to engage and inform residents, businesses, property owners and citywide stakeholders regarding issues, opportunities and accomplishments.

- Personal door to door contact is important in this community.
- Events that build community and strengthen social connections should continue.

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- The creation of a NSCD Newsletter would be desirable in the future, but doing so requires additional resources that would need to be brought to bear in the short term. In the interim, the NSCD should consider the creation of a blog and the use of social media to communicate events, ideas and initiatives.
 - Need to provide separate venues for discussion/forums for residents versus business and property owners.
- 2. Establish a clear vision and direction for North Salina Community Development (NSCD) to undertake its next phase of growth and activity with an eye toward long term organizational goals. Identify the people who will be involved in advancing community driven initiatives, facilitating public decisions and facilitating a consistent and continuous dialogue between residents, businesses, property owners and citywide stakeholders, groups and agencies.**
- Near term, the organization might take three paths moving forward:
 1. Volunteer Resources: Continue as is with all volunteer resources, leaning on a few key members of the community. To keep initiatives moving forward, a handful of key members need to commit for the long term. However, trying to grow the organization from where it is on all volunteer resources will leave the organization more susceptible to the potential for burn out and ultimately loss of these key volunteers.
 2. Volunteer Resources plus Paid Staff Position: Hire a part-time or full-time paid staff person to assist in moving initiatives forward. This will require financial resources, but will aid in advancing initiatives forward in a timelier manner and create some positive pressure and accountability for doing so. Key responsibilities could include internal/external communications, meeting scheduling and organization, grant writing, and project scoping.
 3. Volunteer Resources and Shared City Staff Resources: Work with the city of Salina to get additional assistance through more direct coordination, staff contract agreements, or other partnerships alternatives. This could evolve more informally through the identification of a 'go-to' person on city staff dedicated to coordinating issues relative to North Salina, to a more formalized role across multiple city departments.
 - Longer term, all of the above will be needed as the activities of the organization expand. Expansion of the organization is needed for North Salina to move forward in a positive direction towards the stated community development and smart growth goals. There is a diverse set of activities, many of which the City of Salina cannot or should not take on, that need to be accomplished. The long term view of the organization should be to have some level of permanent staff support.
 - NSCD should look to other organizations and communities to see what has worked (and what hasn't) elsewhere.
- 3. Develop a framework plan for North Salina that will establish general guidance for physical development, uses and activities, infrastructure improvements and environmental considerations. Include short, medium and long term improvements.**
- This plan can be an expansion and clarification of the results of the Building Blocks conversation and outcome.
 - There should be a basic physical plan and associated candidate projects and policies. There should also be a policy and program element.
 - The document would provide guidance for moving forward, but should not be a regulatory plan.

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- The plan could be accomplished through an open charrette process or through more internal efforts of the NSCD and city staff, but continuing to grow community support for the vision will require continuous touch points with the residential and business community stakeholders.
- 4. Explore and seek out appropriate funding mechanisms that support improvement projects and programs, fund organizational and planning activities and increase the presence and power of community dollars in North Salina.**
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a viable tool for the city, but the pace of development and value added development activity is currently very low and likely to remain so over the near term. Therefore TIF should be explored as a longer term approach, recognizing its limitations to produce short term funding.
 - NSCD should be set up as a 501(c)(3) organization, making it eligible for contributions. More importantly, it needs to be able to administer funds and enter into contractual arrangements. These will ultimately include conducting organizational business, program management as an extension of city of Salina functions, project implementation, grant management and unique partnerships (e.g. low-profit limited liability company a.k.a L3C, or partnerships with other non-profits).
 - Membership in NSCD could also be a strategy to bring in additional revenues; however this option should be carefully weighed against the added administration needs with doing so.
 - Grants from state and federal sources are another viable strategy; however the specific local match requirements, grant writing capacity and the potential reporting, administration and monitoring requirements should be carefully assessed before moving forward. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities website (www.sustainablecommunities.gov) provides information on relevant EPA, HUD and DOT grants and federal funding sources.
- 5. Undertake a number of lower-cost, viable and visible projects to increase the awareness of public-private partnership and organized efforts to improve the area.**
- Some of this activity is already occurring and should continue. There are some project examples listed above. Emphasis should be placed on improvements to public rights of way (9th Street tree planting between Euclid and Pacific for a continuous canopy) would be an obvious first step.
- 6. Identify and tackle needed changes and additions to existing policies and procedures to better support smart growth development.**
- This should be explored over the long term, but currently does not provide an obstacle to implementing some of the key ideas and strategies outlined herein for the short term. In fact the longer term policy changes take considerable discussion and debate and therefore should be pursued so long as it does not interfere or distract from the short term initiatives aimed at producing more visible, tangible progress.

Summary

The Salina, KS technical assistance provided community stakeholders with a forum for exploring the key principles of smart growth relative to community redevelopment and revitalization goals. The workshop revealed several key opportunities for redevelopment and incorporation of smart growth and green building design principles, but more importantly it revealed the need for additional organizational capacity building to advance policy, program and project goals outlined in the workshop activities. The key stakeholders present for the workshop represent the key community leaders and representatives who are in a position of influence to make sure the actions outlined herein are moved forward.

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5. Appendix

Additional Resources:

- Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Urban and Suburban Zoning Codes, EPA (http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/pdf/2009_essential_fixes.pdf)
- Getting to Smart Growth; 100 Policies for Implementation, Smart Growth Network, IMCA (<http://www.smartgrowth.org/pdf/gettosg.pdf>)
- Getting to Smart Growth II; 100 More Policies for Implementation, Smart Growth Network, IMCA (<http://www.smartgrowth.org/pdf/gettosg2.pdf>)
- Smart Growth Audits (APA PAS Report 512). Jerry Weitz and Leora Susan Waldner. November 2002.
- This is Smart Growth, EPA (http://www.epa.gov/dced/pdf/2009_11_tisg.pdf)