2011 ASLA Design Awards

A Vision Plan for 84th Street
Merit Award
AECOM, Fort Collins

Planning & Urban Design
Project Name: Vision 84

Project Location, if applicable: La Vista, Nebraska

Purpose of Project. The last several years have seen the slow decline of the 84th Street Corridor with major retail anchors leaving for new developments at the edge of the metro area. As a result, the corridor has deteriorated in appearance, local residents have lost opportunities to shop near their homes, and community pride has suffered. The vision plan provides a road map to:

1. Create a genuine downtown that has never existed in the community
2. Attract new and appropriate private sector mixed-use development
3. Create environments that are desirable, safe, and attractive to motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians
4. Create a versatile live/ work/ play environment that is unique in the Omaha area
5. Provide a development framework that is flexible, ensuring the project can thrive over the long term.

Role of landscape architect / entrant vs. the role of other participants. The landscape architect led a multidisciplinary team of economists, planners, and engineers throughout the entire design and visioning process. In addition to preparing the vision plan, responsibilities of the landscape architect included leading multiple workshops with the community and advisory groups, conducting presentations to city council and planning commission boards, leading public site and project tours, hosting public open houses, preparing newsletter updates, and conducting a community survey.

In support of the landscape architect, the economists prepared a market study for the project, engineers assisted with traffic impact and infrastructure analysis, and a research consultant prepared an analysis and summary of the community survey results. City staff provided meeting locations and distributed quarterly newsletters that were produced by the landscape architect.

Special Factors. The transformation of a 9-hole golf course into La Vista Civic Center Park is the centerpiece of the redeveloped 84th Street, and a key recommendation of the plan. Initially, community leaders were skeptical about replacing the golf course with a park, but over the course of the project, came to understand that a public park and improved greenway has much broader appeal than a golf course. As the jewel of the community and heart for cultural and social events, the park will become a leisure-time attraction for area residents, as well as an amenity to attract new employers, retailers, and residents.

Significance.

Quality of Planning and Design. Models on how to redevelop underperforming, auto-oriented, low density suburban retail areas are sorely needed. This project represents leading edge solutions to reinvigorate suburbs, introduce higher densities, reduce dependency on the automobile, create walkable neighborhoods, and utilize the public realm for multiple benefits (stormwater, recreation, cultural programs, outdoor eating/dining, improved ecological functions, etc.) The design solution incorporates best practices in all aspects of community and public realm design.

Functionalism. The solution is functional, because it is flexible. The framework for redevelopment is established through creating an attraction that appeals to all types of urban uses, and defining a road network and block pattern that will work for many different types of housing, institutions, and businesses. Implementation can be phased and redevelopment can occur based on market conditions, rather than a rigid time frame.

Relationship to Context. A finer grain road network ties into adjacent streets and graduated building heights relate well to the low density character of adjacent residential development. The design character of the buildings and public realm will be appropriate to central Nebraska, and not imported from another area of the country.

Environmental Responsibility. There are specific goals for sustainability provided in the document. The development will be more sustainable than what it was previously because it will be a higher density, mixed-use, walkable neighborhood, which will reduce each resident’s carbon footprint and land consumption.
Creek Basin will be naturalized and its ecological function improved. Trail connections will now be possible through what was previously a fenced golf course. Storm drainage will incorporate LID techniques to treat runoff, and green roofs, photovoltaics and green buildings will be included to the greatest extent feasible.

**Effective use, presentation or programming landscape architectural techniques.** This project included a rigorous public involvement process, which included a walking tour of the site with community residents, a community survey, a day-long tour of similar scaled projects in Kansas City, multiple open house presentations and workshops, multiple planning commission and city council presentations, and regularly issued newsletter updates. Throughout the process, the Landscape Architect implemented a variety of presentation techniques and materials to engage participants. This included a detailed three-dimensional SketchUp model of the entire corridor, hand-drawn illustrative sketches, computer generated sections, and photographic displays of similar places or events envisioned. The variety and volume of graphic material prepared for the project had a significant role in developing enthusiasm and excitement from the community and elected officials, resulting in a rare unanimous city council approval of the plan.

**Opportunities for landscape architecture to have a significant impact on the environment, or environmental decision-making.** This project exemplifies best practices to reduce environmental impacts of new development. It provides opportunities for improvements to the existing natural environment through ecological restoration and stormwater treatment (existing huge rooftop and asphalt parking areas currently drain directly to the Thompson Creek Basin). Adjacent residents will be able to walk or bike to shopping rather than drive miles to other shopping areas. Local food can be produced in new park/community garden areas, and new technologies can be employed to reduce energy use, produce clean energy sources through photovoltaics, and harvest rainwater.

**3-5 Sentence Quick Project Summary.** Vision 84 is a redevelopment plan for a mile-long strip retail corridor that is now mostly vacant. The plan proposes a new Civic Center Park and City Center as key components in the creation of a much needed downtown heart for this suburban community. The project is a model for how low density communities can reposition themselves in the market by creating a high quality public realm, recreational amenities, and a flexible framework to accommodate new uses in a more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner.