

Project Description

Summary

This proposal requests assistance in funding the construction of a **Nature Education Center at Troy Gardens** in Madison, Wisconsin. The Nature Education Center will be a nature and environmental education facility that will broaden the educational and recreational scope of Troy Gardens beyond Madison to the state of Wisconsin.

The proposed center of 2,750 square feet will host environmental education programs and make *year-round programming possible for the first time at Troy Gardens*. It will provide multi-use space for the many stakeholders involved at Troy Gardens to work together more effectively to better achieve their common goals. In so doing, this barrier-free building will enhance current programs – including those previously funded by DNR’s Stewardship program like the Urban Open Space Foundation’s Resource Restoration project - by enabling all of the Troy Gardens community to collaborate more efficiently.

Furthermore, with an indoor, year-round facility, Troy Gardens can finally serve all the regional, state-wide and national groups that have shown interest in this project – *capitalizing on the tourist and educational value of this unique recreation resource*. The City of Madison’s Comprehensive Plan specifically references Troy Gardens as one of the city’s “permanent features of the urban fabric.” The Nature Education Center will be a first-of-its-kind facility for MACLT that will enable the stewards of Troy Gardens to take advantage of this government support to increase its regional and state-wide visibility and programming capacity.

Efforts to raise construction funds for the Nature Education Center have met with early success. The *Madison Community Foundation has already awarded a \$75,000 grant to MACLT* for this purpose. This proposal requests \$160,000, which is equal to 50% of the total funds needed.¹

Background

In 1995, the state of Wisconsin placed a 31-acre undeveloped site abutting the Mendota Mental Health Center grounds on the State's surplus land list. The State intended to sell the site, most likely to a private for-profit developer. Area residents and people from other parts of the city had been gardening on the site for 15 years, and using it to bird-watch, walk their dogs, and simply enjoy the outdoors.

Alarmed at the prospect of losing this valuable resource, concerned gardeners and neighbors, facilitated by the Northside Planning Council, began to strategize together. Their well-founded fear was that the state would sell Troy Gardens to a for-profit housing developer, who would then erect a densely populated, high-end condo development.

Community members and three non-profits (Urban Open Space Foundation, Madison Area Community Land Trust, and Community Action Coalition), formed the Troy Gardens Coalition to formally organize their efforts. Several representatives from the University of Wisconsin joined the Coalition in the fall of 1996.

The Coalition developed an innovative proposal for integrated land use that combined housing with open space and agricultural uses. This proposal, known as the Troy Gardens Development Concept Plan was approved by the Madison Common Council in 1998 (attached to this grant application). This plan reflects the desires of the surrounding neighborhood and is designed to provide numerous benefits to Madison’s northside community, including:

- ◆ Permanent preservation of 26 acres of urban open space;
- ◆ Inexpensive community gardening space for low income households;
- ◆ Nature education programming for all ages;
- ◆ Locally-grown organic food;

¹ This refers only to the portion of the Nature Education Center which will be used specifically to support outdoor nature-based recreation. We estimate that 75% of the building will be used for these purposes.

- ◆ Twenty units of permanently affordable owner-occupied housing in a neighborhood with one of the highest concentrations of subsidized rental housing in the city;
- ◆ A barrier-free neighborhood of 30 homes; and
- ◆ A community building (Nature Education Center) that can be accessed by all, regardless of mobility.

After years of fundraising and pre-development work, the Madison Area Community Land Trust, with financial support from the City of Madison, purchased the property from the State of Wisconsin on December 28, 2001. MACLT purchase the land in two parcels, a 26-acre conservancy parcel and a 5-acre parcel reserved for affordable housing development.

A. Conservancy Parcel

Immediately upon purchase, MACLT leased the 26 acres of conservancy land to the newly established Friends of Troy Gardens (FTG), a non-profit organization dedicated to the development, maintenance, and stewardship of the conservancy parcel. *The 26-acre conservancy site is permanently protected under the terms of a conservation easement held by the Urban Open Space Foundation (UOSF), which prohibits any uses outside of conservancy and agriculture.*

The Conservancy Site is divided into several use areas, including: Troy Community Gardens, the Troy Community Farm, natural areas restoration (native prairie, an edible garden, Hmong traditional medicinal herb garden, an ornamental prairie plantings), and an interpretive trail system for recreation and education. UOSF has provided considerable financial and staff support to Troy Gardens, focusing on the restoration of natural areas.

B. Housing Parcel

Since the 2001 land acquisition at Troy Gardens, MACLT has focused on extensive pre-development work on the 5-acre housing parcel, in preparation for construction of an affordable housing community at the site. This work includes Phase I and II environmental assessments, numerous city and state permits, legal work, architectural design, developing , submitting, and gaining approval of our Planned Unit Development (PUD) application, budget development and refinement, fundraising, construction bids and contracts, negotiating final construction financing, and developing a homebuyer education and marketing program.²

What's special about Troy Gardens Housing?

- Two thirds of the units at Troy Gardens will be sold to low-and moderate-income families, and the remaining ten homes at market-rate prices.
- All units at Troy Gardens will be fully accessible to persons who use wheelchairs. In addition to the housing units, all paths and common areas will be wheelchair accessible.

Furthermore, MACLT is using a neighborhood design that balances the traditional advantages of private home ownership with the benefits of community. The physical design of the development maintains each household's privacy while promoting social interaction and a sense of community. Each household at Troy Gardens will enjoy its own private dwelling with kitchen, living room, bedrooms, bathrooms, and privacy fence surrounding their back courtyard. The design also includes common outdoor gathering places such as green space and children's play areas.

These design standards are intended to address the common isolation of modern subdivisions in which few people know their neighbors. Such developments are seen by social researchers as a promising solution to the challenging social problem of alienation in modern day cities.

Troy Gardens is a nationally recognized model for urban in-fill, smart growth land use planning, and has the potential to serve as a 'best practice' model for new housing communities.

² MACLT is familiar with and has complied with all state and federal requirements for bidding and awarding the construction contract for the residential housing at Troy Gardens. We have a high degree of competency in this area which we will apply to all future building projects.

Those who choose to live at Troy Gardens are consciously committed to their community, so a central gathering place where everyone can come together is essential to maintaining the long-term health of the community. The Nature Education Center will also address this need.

C. Nature Education Center

The proposed Nature Education Center, located at the western edge of the housing parcel, is designed to be a multi-use facility not only for the Troy Gardens community, but for *all Wisconsin residents who wish to learn there*. An indoor programming space will finally enable Friends of Troy Gardens' professional naturalist staff to present educational opportunities at Troy Gardens year round – thus greatly increasing the number of people from around the state who can take advantage of them.

In addition to being a central gathering place for community gardeners, volunteer nature stewards, community farm volunteers and homeowners, the proposed center will host environmental education programs for students of all ages on a program fee basis. The fees generated by these classes will help fund ongoing operations of the Nature Education Center.

Designed to be totally barrier-free, the Nature Education Center will make a wide variety of functions possible:

- ◆ Office space for Friends of Troy Gardens, which will oversee the day to day operations of the Nature Education Center;
- ◆ Large multi-purpose room (including a commercial kitchen) for meetings, workshops, and community events. This room will enable us to promote Troy Gardens as a unique, nature-based recreational resource available to the entire state;
- ◆ Programming space for year-round environmental education classes and workshops for all ages - with a play area for children;
- ◆ Restroom facilities for community gardeners and others using the land (with a separate entrance for weekend and after-hours accessibility).

Current statistics maintained by the Friends of Troy Gardens indicate that in 2005, more than 1,400 people participated in their programs, including community gardens, youth training programs, children's gardening program, Troy Community Farm members and volunteers, prairie restoration volunteers, and public festivals such as Savor the Summer. In addition, the 30-unit housing development is projected to include a total of 75-80 individuals when full. This does not take into account other community groups and the general public, to whom the Nature Education Center will be available for a fee.

As the center of community activity, the Nature Education Center will be a fundamental part of the continuing success of Troy Gardens. It will complement and enhance existing programs – such as UOSF's Resource Restoration project – as well as facilitate additional collaborative programs by providing a fully accessible focal point for these activities. It will enable environmental education programming to expand beyond current parameters –*enabling year-round programming that will attract visitors from around the state --* thereby increasing its impact on the community.

Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Components

MACLT is experienced in building highly energy efficient construction projects. All our new homes (including those currently under construction at Troy Gardens) are Energy Star and Green Built Home certified.³ We have extended these practices to the design of the Nature Education Center and intend to seek Energy Star Certification for it, as well as use LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) commercial guidelines as a framework for design and construction.⁴

³ For more information, please see www.greenbuilthome.org and www.energystar.gov.

⁴ MACLT may also seek LEED commercial certification for the Nature Education Center if funding permits. A number of commercial buildings, including Madison's Overture Center, have been built according to LEED guidelines but have not become certified under LEED because of the extra cost involved in doing so.

Energy Star is an EPA-sponsored program that helps businesses and individuals protect the environment through superior energy efficiency. Energy Star certified buildings are independently verified according to the 2004 International Energy Conservation Code whose standards cover heating, cooling, and hot water energy use. Energy Star buildings contribute to lower energy demand and reduced air pollution.

The energy efficient and green features of the Nature Education Center will include:

- Barrier-free and fully compliant with ADA building standards.
- Built-in “renewable-ready” design features: the building will be pre-wired and pre-plumbed for easy installation of photovoltaic panels for electricity generation and solar hot water. MACLT will install these features in the future if funding enables us to do so. MACLT is currently helping to pilot the new “solar-ready” standards of Wisconsin’s Focus on Energy program at Troy Gardens housing.
- Energy Star furnace with programmable thermostat to save heating expenses.
- High mass solar radiant floor heating system, which will provide for roughly 50% of heating needs for the building.
- Energy Star refrigerator and dishwasher in the kitchen.
- On-demand tankless water heaters for the kitchen and bathrooms
- Energy Star central air conditioning (in addition, the building has been designed to minimize the need for air conditioning: casement windows provide air flow on three sides of the building and a concrete slab below the floor lends a passive cooling effect).
- Highly insulated exterior walls and energy efficient windows.
- Energy Recovery Ventilator (ERV) to regulate indoor moisture, circulate fresh air, and recycle energy inside the building.
- Energy Star (fluorescent) lighting fixtures to save electricity
- Direct-venting fans for range and bathrooms to improve indoor air quality.
- Low VOC paints will be used on all paintable surfaces indoors.
- Recycled materials to include, at minimum, engineered trusses/beams, OSB, and metal siding.

Ongoing Management and Maintenance of Facility

MACLT will be the legal owner of the Nature Education Center. The Friends of Troy Gardens will coordinate the activities of the Center’s many users. Day-to-day janitorial functions will be required as part of the lease agreements with FTG and any other ongoing tenants. Funds to maintain the building and pay utility bills will come from rental income for both office and program space. Homeowners at Troy Gardens will also contribute to the upkeep of the Center through their monthly condo dues.

An endowment fund – in memory of MACLT’s founder, Sol Levin – was started in 2001 for the purpose of maintaining the common facilities at Troy Gardens. MACLT has dedicated this fund as capital reserves for the Nature Education Center. After construction is completed, a portion of all rental fees and condo dues will be added to this endowment fund each month, enabling MACLT to provide for long-term maintenance and replacement of capital-intensive building components.

Project Status

Construction on the residential condos at Troy Gardens began in March 2006 and will be completed in December 2006. MACLT is actively engaged in an affirmative marketing program to reach a diverse audience of potential homebuyers, and has also developed an in-house educational program that includes homeowner orientations and first-time homebuyer classes. To date, we have accepted reservations for 20 of the 30 condos and have a waiting list for 2-bedroom units. Note that MACLT will retain ownership of the land in perpetuity – the condo association will not own the land.

The Nature Education Center will be funded and constructed separately from the home construction. We have developed detailed architectural designs in conjunction with the Friends of Troy Gardens and Urban Open Space Foundation, and have also conducted two community charettes to obtain community feedback on preliminary designs. *Construction of the Center will begin in the summer of 2007 and finish within a three-month time period.*

Because this building has been envisioned as part of the Troy Gardens housing parcel since the beginning, it has been included in plans that MACLT submitted to the City of Madison, including the Planned Unit Development (PUD) application. These plans have already been approved by both the Urban Design Commission and the City Council, and the Troy Gardens PUD has been recorded. In addition, all utility easements are in place and underground utilities will be installed as part of the housing construction process. Building permits for the Nature Education Center will be drawn by the builder when construction starts in the spring of 2007.

Key Partnerships

Over the course of many years and numerous meetings, *neighborhood residents have had a central voice in the planning* for Troy Gardens. MACLT has worked extensively and very closely with a variety of organizations throughout the development process for Troy Gardens. Key partnerships include:

- ◆ Representative Tammy Baldwin: Representative Baldwin was instrumental in helping MACLT obtain nearly \$750,000 in HUD funding for the project, which covered the cost of purchasing the housing site for Troy Gardens, as well as helping to make 20 of the homes affordable to low-to-moderate income homebuyers.
- ◆ City of Madison CDBG Office: The CDBG Office has provided invaluable support to Troy Gardens, including administering the HUD and a substantial zero-interest construction loan to further reduce our costs of construction.
- ◆ Community Action Coalition: CAC managed the community gardens at Troy Gardens for many years, and was deeply involved in the process of developing the first comprehensive plan for Troy Gardens.
- ◆ Forward Community Investments (formerly known as The Dane Fund): The Dane Fund is providing significant financing for pre-construction and construction costs at below-market interest rates.
- ◆ Friends of Troy Gardens: FTG manages the conservancy areas of Troy Gardens, and organizes the community gardens, operates the CSA farm, conducts nature-based education programming for young people.
- ◆ Madison Community Foundation: MCF has provided grant funding to both the Friends of Troy Gardens and the Madison Area Community Land Trust for their work at Troy Gardens.
- ◆ Madison Gas and Electric: MGE is providing energy grant funding to cover a portion of the cost of the Energy Star and Green Built features of Troy Gardens Homes.
- ◆ Northside Planning Council: NPC played a key role in organizing the community process that created the comprehensive plan for Troy Gardens, as well as mobilizing support for community ownership of Troy Gardens.
- ◆ University of Wisconsin Department of Urban and Regional Planning: URPL has been involved at Troy Gardens for over 10 years, assisting in the development of the initial comprehensive plan, and has continued to participate actively on the boards of both the Friends of Troy Gardens and MACLT.
- ◆ Urban Open Space Foundation: UOSF holds a conservation easement protecting the greenspace areas of Troy Gardens, and coordinated much of the restoration work on the natural areas of Troy Gardens.
- ◆ Wisconsin Department of Commerce -- Bureau of Housing: The Bureau of Housing has provided grant funding to reduce the sale prices of the income-restricted homes at Troy Gardens.

Project Budget

Construction costs for the Nature Education Center were determined using a per square foot formula standard in the construction industry for commercial buildings. The total building will be 2,750 square feet, of which 75% will be directly used for support of outdoor nature-based recreation and environmental education programs. The budget below shows only the portion of the building qualified for a DNR Stewardship grant. The remainder of the building will be funded separately.

Uses of Funds

Construction costs: 2,063 sq. ft. @ \$129.00 per sq. ft.	\$266,063
Furnishings and Appliances =	\$25,500
Contingency: 10% of budget =	<u>\$29,420</u>
Total Uses for nature-based portion of building:	\$320,982

Sources of Funds

Applicant Match

• Madison Community Foundation (obtained)	\$75,000
• Wisconsin Focus on Energy (non-competitive grant)	\$10,000
• Furniture & appliances contributed by local retailers	\$25,000
• Other fundraising (in process)	\$30,000
• Sponsor Funds	<u>\$21,000</u>
Subtotal Applicant Match	\$161,000
DNR Stewardship Grant	\$160,000
Total Sources of Funds =	\$321,000

Please note the following:

- The Madison Community Foundation grant to MACLT is already committed.
- The Focus on Energy program has agreed to provide funding to partially cover the cost of the energy efficiency components of the building, although these funds will not be available until these components are installed.
- We are currently in discussion with several local retailers to obtain donations to cover furniture and appliances for the Nature Education Center.
- Other fundraising: we are in the process of writing several small grants (\$5,000 - \$10,000) to obtain these funds. *A DNR Stewardship grant would greatly increase our chances of obtaining these grants.*
- MACLT has budgeted funds from the sale of housing units at Troy Gardens to cover the Sponsor's Funds share of funds needed.
- Each of the sources above (except for the MCF grant) represents only 75% of total funds we will raise, so the remaining 25% of funds needed to construct non-recreational portions of the building will also be available. Thus, construction can begin no later than the spring of 2007.