

**Narrative for Veridian Homes Foundation Proposal for the
Troy Gardens Nature Education Center**

Troy Gardens is a nationally-recognized urban “eco-neighborhood” that combines mixed-income owner-occupied townhomes, community gardens, a working farm, restored prairies, walking trails – and soon, a Nature Education Center.

Troy Gardens is being developed by the Madison Area Community Land Trust, based on the following *guiding principles*:

- Honoring the hopes and dreams of the neighbors and community gardeners who made this project possible.
- Providing permanently affordable homeownership opportunities in a mixed-income setting.
- Modeling innovative development and construction practices that can inspire others to follow our lead.
- Providing educational programming to children, teens and adults focusing on conservation, organic agriculture, community gardening, and healthy cooking/eating.
- Removing barriers to persons with disabilities so that they can fully enjoy all the benefits of Troy Gardens.
- Providing a beautiful retreat for people to reconnect with nature – without having to leave the city.

The **Troy Gardens Nature Education Center** will serve as the focal point for Troy Gardens that brings together all the different elements of the project, a year-round facility hosting educational programming, office space for the Friends of Troy Gardens, play space for children, and meeting space for all the community gardeners, farmers, nature stewards, program staff, and residents of Troy Gardens.

With an indoor facility, education programs at Troy Gardens will no longer be limited to the warm-weather months of the year. The Nature Education Center will be a first-of-its-kind facility for the Madison Area Community Land Trust that will enable the stewards of Troy Gardens to greatly increase their 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 Madison Area Community Land Trust* for this purpose.

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 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, with organizing assistance from the Northside Planning Council, began to strategize together. 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 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. 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;
- ◆ 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 and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), purchased the property from the State of Wisconsin in December 2001. The Madison Area Community Land Trust purchased the land in two parcels, (a) a 26-acre conservancy parcel, and (b) a 5-acre parcel reserved for affordable housing development.

A. Conservancy Land

Immediately upon purchase, the Madison Area Community Land Trust 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).

The Conservancy Site is divided into several areas, including: 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.

B. Housing Site

Between the 2001 land acquisition at Troy Gardens and the start of construction in the spring of 2006, Madison Area Community Land Trust focused on extensive pre-development work on the 5-acre housing parcel, in preparation for construction of an affordable housing community at the site.

Construction on the residential condos at Troy Gardens began in March 2006 and will be completed in December 2006. Madison Area Community Land Trust 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: the Madison Area Community Land Trust will retain ownership of the land in perpetuity – the condominium association will lease the land under a 196-year ground lease.]

What's special about Troy Gardens Housing?

- Mixed-Income: 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.
- Accessible: All homes at Troy Gardens will comply with the Easy Living Homes standard, with fully accessible first floors including a bedroom and a full bath. In addition to the housing units, all paths and common areas will be wheelchair accessible.

Furthermore, the neighborhood design draws on principles of cohousing to balance the traditional advantages of private home ownership with the benefits 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. Thus, each household's privacy is maintained, yet the design promotes social interaction and a sense of community.

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.

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 for the entire Troy Gardens community. 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.

In a larger sense, it will also enable *Troy Gardens' full potential to shine* by hosting workshops, conferences, and education programs for both students and scholars from around the region.

An indoor programming space will finally enable Friends of Troy Gardens' professional staff to present educational programming at Troy Gardens on a year-round basis, thus greatly expanding the scope of their services. The fees generated by these classes will help fund ongoing operations of the Nature Education Center.

Designed as a barrier-free ADA-compliant facility, the 2,750 square foot 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.
- ◆ 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).

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. In addition, the 30-unit housing development is projected to include a total of 75-80 individuals when completed.¹

These numbers understate the potential use of the Nature Education Center, however. The Center will be available to community groups and the general public, as well as visiting researchers and guests. *The Nature Education Center is the critical component that will enable Troy Gardens to serve a wider community.*

The Nature Education Center will be funded and built separately from the construction of the townhomes at Troy Gardens. We have developed detailed architectural designs in conjunction with major stakeholders at Troy Gardens, and have also conducted two charrettes to obtain community feedback on our preliminary designs. Construction of the Center will begin in the summer of 2007, and will be completed within three to six months.

Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Components

Madison Area Community Land Trust 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. We have extended

¹ Homeowners 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.

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.² We are also exploring the use of the Green Globes environmental assessment protocol.

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

- **Solar Features:**
 - High mass solar radiant floor heating system, which will provide for roughly 50% of heating needs for the building. This solar thermal system will also provide preheating for hot water.
 - *PV-Ready* – implementation of the new Focus on Energy Standard to enable easy addition of solar photovoltaic panels at any point in the future.
 - [The MACLT is already piloting the new Focus on Energy “*solar thermal ready*” standard on all thirty townhomes at Troy Gardens.]
 - Three foot roof overhangs to maximize shading in hotter months.
- Slab-on-grade construction will provide a large thermal mass to store heat going into the colder months, and help keep things cool.
- Ceiling fans in every room to minimize air conditioning days.
- Energy Star appliances, light fixtures, and mechanical systems.
- On-demand tankless water heater.
- Reduction of need to run air conditioning system through window design (casement windows on three sides of building), passive cooling effect of concrete slab, and use of ceiling fans.
- 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.
- Direct-venting fans for range and bathrooms to improve indoor air quality.
- Low VOC paints.
- Recycled materials to include, at minimum, engineered trusses/beams, OSB, and metal siding.

Cost of Construction

The estimated cost of constructing the Nature Education Center is described as follows:

Construction Costs		
total sq footage	2,750	
Cost per sq foot	\$120	
	Subtotal	\$330,000
Furnishings/appliances		\$37,500
Solar/Renewable Energy		\$25,000
Admin/Overhead	10%	\$39,250
	Total	\$431,750

² 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.

Ongoing Management and Maintenance of Facility

Madison Area Community Land Trust will be the legal owner of the Nature Education Center. The Friends of Troy Gardens (FTG) 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 Madison Area Community Land Trust's founder, Sol Levin – was started in 2001 for the purpose of maintaining the common facilities at Troy Gardens. Madison Area Community Land Trust 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 Madison Area Community Land Trust to provide for long-term maintenance and replacement of capital-intensive building components.

Additional information about the Nature Education Center and the Madison Area Community Land Trust is available on our website at the following location:
www.affordablehome.org/maclt/veridian.

This webpage contains:

- An archive of articles about Troy Gardens,
- Listing of our partner organizations,
- Information about Troy Gardens townhomes,
- And other helpful information.