

WAUNAKEE, WISCONSIN

ICMA's 2007 Community Sustainability Award in the 10,000-to-49,999 population category goes to the village of Waunakee, Wisconsin, and Village Administrator Ronald K. Wilde for the Stokely Site Redevelopment.



RONALD K. WILDE

Constructed in 1924, the Stokely vegetable canning factory in Waunakee, Wisconsin, operated until 1997 when market changes made the operation no longer viable. The abandoned, blighted factory—21 different structures on 13.5 acres in three separate parcels—brought down surrounding property values. Moreover, the soil and groundwater contamination found on two parcels threatened the safety of residents, while the third parcel had abandoned equipment, concrete storage areas, and old paving that all needed removal and disposal. While touring the site, one state legislator who had viewed the destruction in Eastern Europe stated, “This place reminds me of a war zone.”

A dynamic economy in nearby Madison has been fueling population growth in Waunakee, where people are attracted by the outstanding quality of life. Many of these new residents want youth programming, family activities, sport/fitness programs, and educational opportunities. In addition, while Waunakee has a thriving senior services program, offering senior case management services, nutrition, and wellness programs that are critical to the well-being of its seniors, many seniors today are interested in activities such as tai chi, low-impact aerobics, foreign language, computers, and special events. But all of these programs require space, which Waunakee's senior center, at

just over 2,000 square feet, lacked. Finally, many of the village's seniors also needed affordable housing opportunities.

The Stokely Site Redevelopment project was initiated in 2001 when the village formed a partnership with Cannery Row, LLC, a private entity that had purchased the former Stokely property. The partners jointly applied for several grants to enable the village to acquire and demolish the dilapidated plant and make the property available for reuse at a reasonable cost. Ultimately, they secured three brownfield grants and three other grants totaling \$1,225,000.

The plan was to use the first parcel for a new private senior housing complex, the second for a new community/senior center, and the third for a stormwater detention facility. Additional village infrastructure, including streets, utilities, and stormwater conveyance improvements, was needed to make development possible. Using an innovative mix of grants, private dollars, tax increment financing, impact fees, borrowing, and a partnership with a neighbor community, the partners were able to acquire the property for \$500,000 and fund the demolition and cleanup at \$600,000; the senior housing complex (privately funded with TIF assistance) at \$5,000,000; the village center at \$7,000,000; and infrastructure at \$1,500,000.

Rather than construct a separate facility for seniors, the partners decided to construct one large multi-generational building that would address the needs of both seniors



Stokely Site Redevelopment: before and after

and the rest of the community. This decision was the product of five years of careful study and extensive public outreach and participation. The result, a 45,000-square-foot facility completed in early 2006, was named the Village Center. This innovative building offers a wide range of spaces and programs for individuals of all ages, including a large dining space for seniors, a beautiful lounge, wellness areas, a computer lab/classroom, an arts and crafts space, a multiuse gymnasium, an indoor walking track, exercise equipment, and community meeting rooms. The distinctive design, which was based on a needs assessment and operations pro forma, was directed by an outstanding architectural team from Denver, Colorado, and Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

With careful project management, the building and infrastructure were completed *on time, within budget,*

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and according to the projected pro forma. It was very important to village leaders to deliver these results, since projected total costs for the center, completion times, and operational expenses had been extensively publicized. Even more important are the numbers:

- Nearly 14 acres of dangerous, blighted property have been cleaned up and reused.
- Fifty affordable housing units have been constructed for the village's senior population.
- More than 800 fitness memberships have been sold, and 750 residents have participated in fitness classes.
- Five full-time jobs and 30 parttime jobs have been created, adding more than \$5 million to the tax base.
- The 33 residential properties north of the project have meant \$1,460,000 of new valuation since 2002.

The Stokely Site Redevelopment project has been very well received, and participation levels have exceeded estimates. Clearly, assembling and managing an effective team of staff and consultants and working closely with decision makers were critical factors in that success. But most important was the involvement of citizens and stakeholders; although challenging at times, extensive public participation not only builds trust but also shapes the end product to better meet community needs.