

## **GreenStep Cities Best Practice #5** **- final draft for comment through May 2010 -**

***Building Reuse: Create economic and regulatory incentives for redeveloping and repurposing existing buildings before building new.***

**Category:** Buildings & Lighting

**Optional** for all cities

### **Summary**

Old is the new green! Reuse or adaptive redevelopment of existing buildings meets sustainability goals in several ways. First, adaptive redevelopment or reuse allows new investment that uses existing infrastructure, or even provides an opportunity to rebuild or upgrade infrastructure. Streets, water and wastewater systems, and systems for energy distribution and telecommunication usually already exist. Reusing buildings is an effective strategy for implementing mixed use, pedestrian-oriented community revitalization programs. Second, reusing the energy and materials embodied in existing buildings avoids the energy and resource use associated with a new building, while still allowing new investment within the community. Finally, existing buildings are frequently imbued with the historic character of the community, both in the building itself and in the setting around existing buildings. Advances in building technology, strategies for flexible space use and the resources of the historic preservation movement make reuse more economically affordable than in past years.

### **Best Practice Actions**

- For all cities: complete at least one of the following actions if you choose to implement this best practice.
  - (1) Develop and adopt an historic preservation ordinance to encourage adaptive reuse, with attention to energy and resource conservation, indoor air quality and other green building practices.
  - (2) For cities with traditional downtown areas, implement the Main Street™ model for commercial revitalization with attention to green building practices.
  - (3) Work with a local school to either add-on space, or to repurpose space into non-school uses, with attention to green building practices.
  - (4) Create/modify a green residential remodeling assistance/financing program to assist homeowners in adding space to their existing homes while retaining historic architectural elements.
  - (5) Adopt development and design standards that facilitate infill and redevelopment, such as developing strip/big box commercial areas into more livable/walkable neighborhoods and gathering places.

See the best practice *Higher Density* for alley house renovations.

### **GreenStep Advisor**

- Bonnie McDonald, Executive Director, Preservation Alliance of MN: 651/293-9047, x5, [bmcDonald@mnpreservation.org](mailto:bmcDonald@mnpreservation.org)

### **Implementation Resources**

(tied to the relevant action by number)

- (1) Assistance on ordinances from the National Trust for Historic Preservation:  
<http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/public-policy/center-for-state-local-policy>
- (1) Assistance on barn preservation from Friends of Minnesota Barns:  
<http://www.friendsofminnesotabarns.org>

- (2) Minnesota Main Street, a program based on the national model, of the Preservation Alliance of MN: <http://www.mnpreservation.org>
- (2) Hometown MN, a nonprofit organization founded by communities active in the Minnesota Main Street Program: <http://www.hometown.mn.org>
- (3) Cities and their economic development talent and contacts can assist a school program, faced with declining enrollment, to remain in its building by leasing building space. See *Policy Recommendations for Encouraging Community-Centered Schools* and other tools: <http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/historic-schools>
- (4) Pattern books from architect Robert Gerloff of Minneapolis for remodeling bungalows, Cape Cods, split-level and Ranch homes: <http://www.residentialarchitects.com/default.asp>
- (4) First Suburbs Coalition (of Kansas City) *2008 Green Remodeling Idea Book*: <http://www.marc.org/assets/green-idea-book.pdf>
- (5) *Urban Sprawl Repair Kit*: Simple infill retrofits for 5 suburban building prototypes that repurpose and build around existing buildings, taking advantage of typically extensive setbacks and parking lots: <http://www.re-burbia.com/2009/08/04/sprawl-building-types-repair-toolkit/>

## Benefits

- Allows new investment to use existing infrastructure.
- Provides an opportunity to use rehabilitation funds to rebuild or upgrade existing infrastructure.
- A key strategy for implementing mixed use, pedestrian-oriented community revitalization programs.
- Reuses the energy and materials embedded in existing buildings, avoiding the energy and resource use associated with new buildings.
- Helps retain the historic and cultural character of the community, both in the building itself and in the setting around existing buildings.
- Buildings are vast repositories of energy, reports Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. For a 50,000 square foot building, he notes, the combined costs of teardown and replacement -- hauling away tons of waste, re-excavating, manufacturing new construction materials, operating tools, installing lighting and heating and cooling systems -- "embodies" the equivalent of 640,000 gallons of gasoline. Moe asserts that even if a project includes 40% recycled materials, it takes approximately 65 years for a green, energy-efficient office building to recover the energy lost in demolishing and replacing an existing building.

## Connection to State Policy

- The 2009 Minnesota Legislature passed, and the Governor signed a bill removing school siting acreage constraints, thus removing a barrier to renovation of existing school buildings. Previously mandated large school sites biased school renovation/expansion toward building new schools, typically on green field sites outside of cities, which prevents more children from walking and biking to school.