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“The City of Milwaukee owns 2,000 vacant lots.”

— Alderman Robert Bauman

John Holz, AIA

As part of the AIA’s 150th anniversary celebration, architects and communities in Wisconsin are working together to find ways of designing a better future. This initiative seeks to bring exquisitely designed, affordable, sustainable, and accessible modular infill housing to three neighborhoods in the largest population centers of southeastern Wisconsin, where such dignified housing has become extremely scarce. With 2,000 vacant residential lots in Milwaukee alone, a sense of community in many neighborhoods struggles to take root. Gaps in the fabric become lifeless no man’s land, perpetuating further disinvestment and blight. We aim to reweave these neighborhoods, planting the gaps with real vitality.

Milwaukee’s Merrill Park Neighborhood and Racine’s Towerview Neighborhood will each receive housing units intended as catalysts for future infill units in the same neighborhoods, knitting them together one by one. The new housing in Milwaukee will also include a Community Center. This neighborhood hub will be the place for design and construction meetings for future housing opportunities, other pro-bono architectural services, as well as workshops and functions to benefit and inspire the community. Everything from CPR training to first-time homebuyer consultations and job skills seminars will take place. All age groups will be represented. Coordinating the programs will be the Merrill Park Neighborhood Association whose office will be located here. Additionally, the Community Center will serve as the ‘storefront’ office for AIA Milwaukee. Our regional chapter remains one of the largest un-staffed components in the United States. By creating an integrated ‘storefront’ and meeting space, we endeavor to raise the profile of AIA architects as advocates for the community.

