

11

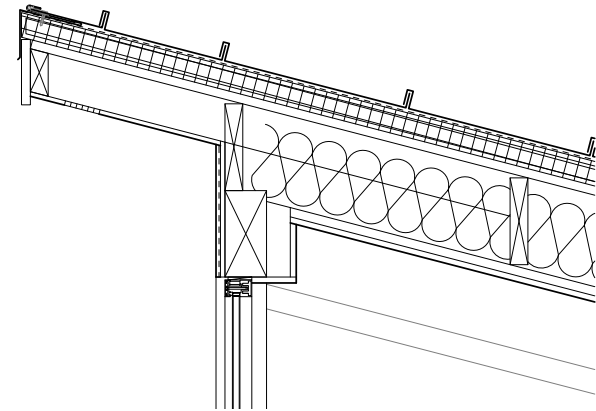
LESSONS LEARNED

CHALLENGES, COMPROMISES & BENEFITS

As part of the formal review of the AIA150 Reweaving the Neighborhood Fabric initiative, leaders were asked to complete a questionnaire detailing the lessons learned during the process. What follows is an excerpt of that document.

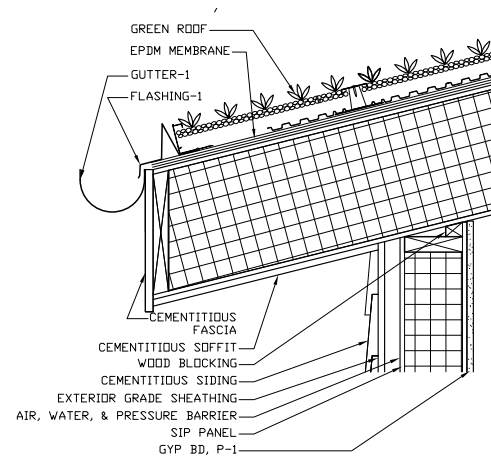
How is your component's initiative meeting the Blueprint For America (BFA) criteria?

The implementation of our BFA initiative is meeting our criteria of community engagement and collaboration through its comprehensive visioning and design process. Our most successful effort has been the integration of a college design studio with the community-based visioning process. This approach yielded prototype housing and a community center, complete with construction documents and budgets with the full engagement of community stakeholders. This collaboration among many - neighborhood groups, city leaders and policy-makers, non-profits, modular housing manufacturers, architecture students, faculty, and our AIA Milwaukee team - exceeded our expectations by receiving local and national media attention in print, audio, and video, as well as a 2007 NCARB Prize. While our visioning process has demonstrated a direct, community-wide benefit, the implementation of our hard work is yet to be realized. A large part of the direct community-wide benefit is the actual construction of our prototypes and community center. There are two main reasons for this phase not being accomplished. The first reason is the reluctance of the City of Milwaukee to adopt our forward-thinking design solutions without major exterior modification. The second, and much more impactful, is the collapse of the housing market, especially in the areas of low-income housing.



How is your initiative focusing on issues that are community-driven or generated?

Through the implementation of our BFA Initiative, we learned to adapt to differing affordable housing issues between Racine and Milwaukee. Gaining importance in Racine was desire for affordable housing that closely matched market rate housing in terms of amenities, while still meeting the lower square footage and price-point for first time home buyers in a subsidized program. We made these adjustments to improve the attraction of the housing to potential candidates, with only marginal budget increases. In Milwaukee, our prototypes were challenged by the alderman of the district for being too small for the neighborhood. We quickly learned that the type of housing desired in our chosen Merrill Park Neighborhood was “work-force” housing, priced above “extremely low income” housing. We subsequently enlarged each design by 200 square feet. We would still be designing for first-time home buyers, well below the median income level, meeting the criteria for our initiative. Another issue that arose during the process impacting its direction was reluctance to adopt the concepts. Milwaukee is conservative, and the alderman of the district encouraged traditional exterior fenestration. We made extensive changes to the facades and resubmitted to the City of Milwaukee Design Review Team which applauded and approved them.

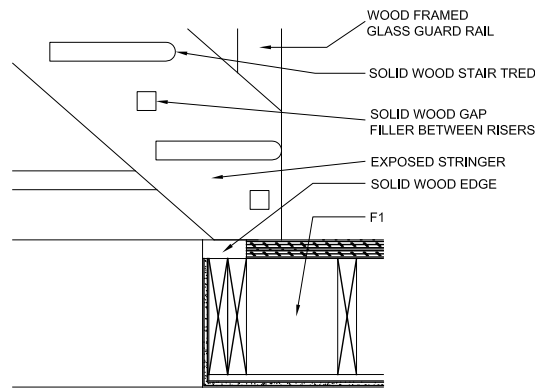


What strong public benefits have emerged or are emerging from your initiative?

The strongest public benefits that have thus far emerged from our BFA Initiative is that neighborhood stakeholders can play an important role in the visioning and design process, and that good design is not just for paying clients, but for everyone who lives in the community. Our neighborhood community groups are learning that architects care about the neighborhood fabric, enough to put in great deals of time, expertise, and sweat equity without the requirement of compensation. They were frankly astounded that we had no ulterior motive to capitalize on the process. A strong relationship built on trust and collaboration has been established between the architectural community and each neighborhood group. This emerging public benefit will be strengthened when the neighborhood stakeholders see construction taking place, fulfilling the objectives and goals of their involvement in the visioning process. A clear benefit that has emerged even without the construction of the housing, has been the lasting impact that this process has had on the architecture students who have participated in the AIA150 Studio. They are now practicing in the profession, incorporating their experiences into new projects, for both paying customers and in pro-bono efforts.

What have been the successes (or failures) associated with the initiatives component of community partnerships?

Our partnership with the City of Racine, the Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) and the Towerview Neighborhood has been successful. Working with these groups to gain a site for our project, reach a common understanding to design and implement quality affordable housing, and conduct a meaningful town hall meeting with the neighborhood stakeholders have exceeded our expectations. We have fallen short in that NHS has decided not to build our housing prototype 'on speculation', but instead will wait for a candidate that meets the criteria of their housing program. Funds are in short supply, as the affordable housing market struggles to rebound. In Milwaukee, our partnership with The Merrill Park Neighborhood Association has been successful. They are a willing and energetic partner. We have struggled in our partnership with Milwaukee. Each party has had differing expectations in the process and its implementation, and we are learning to amend our approach to meet the explicit and implicit criteria of Milwaukee's review and approval process. Still, we see that this partnership will be fruitful and long-term. The City's promise of residential sites, approval of the community center, and approval of revised plans for our housing prototypes, is a strong indication of their commitment.



How were schools of architecture engaged in the process?

The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, School of Architecture and Urban Planning was integrally involved in our initiative. No other schools or academic disciplines were involved. AIA150 Champion Holz engaged Dean Robert Greenstreet, and Professor Chris Cornelius to develop an AIA150 Studio, comprised of mostly graduate students divided into three teams of five. The teams interacted collaboratively with all aspects of the process. With Professor Cornelius, the students toured modular housing manufacturing facilities in Wausau and Friendship, Wisconsin. Terrace Homes of Friendship became the key collaborator, working with the students and AIA150 committee throughout the fall 2006 Semester and beyond. The students' work included site analyses, demographic studies, computer and wood models, renderings and construction drawings with budgets developed using Means Cost Data. They produced PowerPoint Presentations and a dedicated website displaying individual housing designs, the three group housing designs and community center design. After the students completed their semester in December 2007, several remained active in the initiative. The UWM Chapter of AIAS became involved in 2007 to participate in a gallery display of both the students' work and 150 years of housing examples throughout the region of AIA Milwaukee. AIAS also collaborated on an AIA150 seminar at Forum 2007.

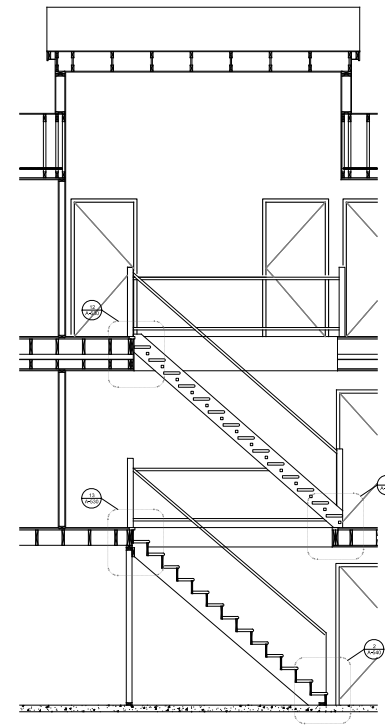
Has a clear strategy for sustained implementation beyond 2007 been implemented?

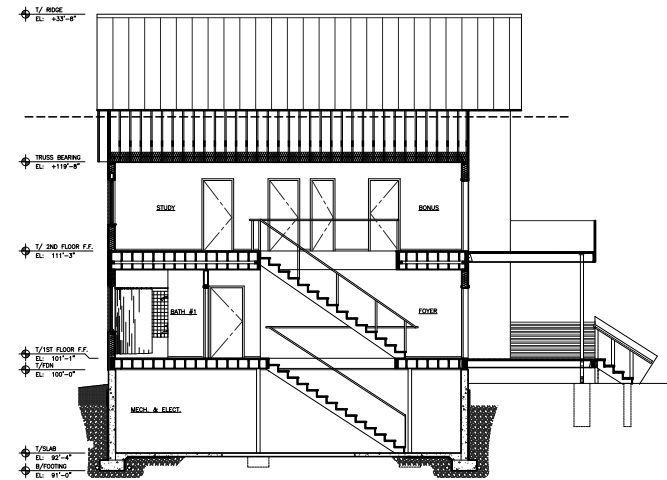
Since our initiative began, a thoughtful dialogue is taking place between community leaders, city leaders and developers. Developers are engaging in higher quality dignified design, which is becoming viewed as a fundamental of sustained home ownership and neighborhood pride. Before the housing crisis hit, we began to work with the Legacy Redevelopment Corporation, which is rebuilding a depressed neighborhood in Milwaukee. While this development is yet to begin, its approach to making a livable community is evident. One of our prototypes will be built in the development. Similarly, our engagement with The Merrill Park Neighborhood Association has brought a change to how that neighborhood will accept new housing proposals, to ensure that the proposals truly reweave the neighborhood fabric and instill pride in the community. The neighborhood's current residents will participate in the process. Working with the City of Milwaukee, our prototypes will be added to a pre-approved compendium of suitable home plans for vacant lots. In Racine, proposals by Habitat for Humanity and other organizations are being met with greater scrutiny by NHS and the City Development Office to ensure that plans are not just affordable, but meet the standards of good design, accessibility and sustainability.

Has your budget planning from fund-raising to expenditures proved to be credible and manageable?

Our fundraising totals thus far have not matched what we have aimed to accomplish in our initiative. It was our aim to raise \$150,000 in cash toward the construction of the community center and to offset contingencies and improve sustainable design features for each of the three prototype designs. We have exceeded our goals for each of the three housing prototypes, but must raise additional funds for the community center. We have begun creating marketing materials, complete with graphics and renderings of the proposed community center, to enhance our fund-raising efforts. When one considers in-kind contributions of products, resources and time, we have done well. We have raised \$19,000 in cash to date, not counting the \$2,500 that remains on our AIA Supplemental Grant. In-kind donations include a commitment by the Kohler Company to provide all plumbing fixtures for all three prototypes and the community center. We have received the fixtures for one of the prototypes thus far, at a value of approximately \$8,000. This contribution is truly an unplanned and pleasant surprise. An in-kind donation from Riley Construction during actual ground breaking has been committed, estimated at approximately \$10,000. None of the aforementioned dollars and in-kind donations have been implemented, as we have yet to begin construction. For our gallery display during National Architecture Week in April of 2007, Mortenson Construction donated all printing and mounting costs of our display boards, valued at over \$1,000. AIA Wisconsin provided all AIA150 banners, stands, and mounting hardware, at over \$2,000, while Riley Construction and Delta Electric installed and removed them from street poles in Racine.

AIA Milwaukee has contributed a budget of \$800, \$500, and \$300 each of the last three years to cover various food events, permits, parking fees, mileage reimbursements, and the like. The contribution of time, expertise and resources by UWM's School of Architecture and Urban Planning has been outstanding, and immeasurable. Similarly, the contribution of time, expertise and resources by Terrace Homes has been considerable and beyond our expectations.

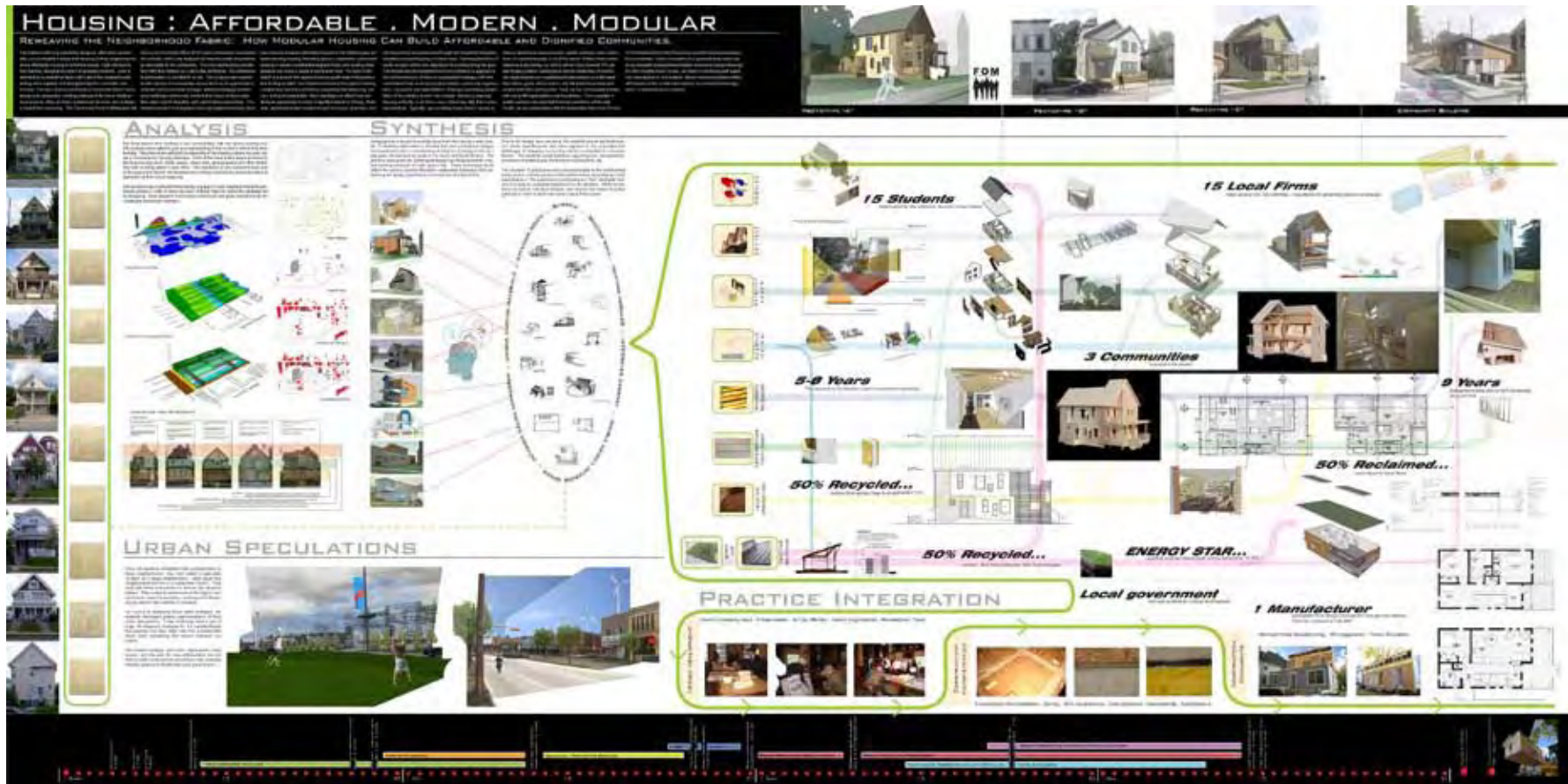




Has your original written proposal as set forth in your supplemental grant application been an effective road-map in guiding your initiative?

Our efforts have followed our proposed process to a great extent, yet we have adapted the process to account for significant challenges. First, because of miscalculations regarding the acceptable deliverables for the City of Milwaukee, we have made considerable changes to the prototype housing designs. This turn of events has pushed us to rethink the process. We did not meet with the alderman of the Merrill Park Neighborhood early enough in the initiative. This was a critical misstep that we are documenting. Second, poor economic conditions have placed the construction component of our initiative in a holding pattern. In these tough economic times, developers tend to gravitate toward tested and proven models. Modular, affordable, sustainable, modern housing is a leap of faith that many find difficult to make. Because of these factors, the amount of time to implement our built projects continues to increase. We have been slow to respond to these significant challenges, in part because our team has shrunk drastically since we began three years ago, most of the students have moved on, and continued setbacks have sapped us of our energy. Still, there is new resolve to fully complete this already successful initiative. AIA Milwaukee remains committed with annual financial resources and support.

AIA150 Champion Holz is in the process of rebuilding the team, and has added a marketing expert from a local construction management firm, Berghammer Construction, to promote the prototypes and community center. To reach consensus on design updates, a meeting with Alderman Bauman and Merrill Park Neighborhood Association Director, Bob Greene, has taken place. Plans have been finalized and resubmitted to the Design Review Team, which enthusiastically approved them. As of this writing, Terrace Homes is re-pricing the final designs. As we are now moving forward, we endeavor to complete the full intent of our initiative, honor the contribution of our sponsors, and realize our ultimate goal to reweave the neighborhood fabric with modular, affordable and dignified housing.



Above
 NCARB Prize Entry Boards.

National Recognition: *AIA150 Studio Wins 2007 NCARB Prize*

Jury Comments

“Strong points of the project are the work with modular manufacturers and firms, its willingness to take on a variety of issues including sustainability, integration into the neighborhoods and material selection, and the emphasis on the process of building particularly over a critical time frame. This is a solid, well-done project that does not look like modular housing and that looked at practice in a new way. The boards clearly presented the project process.”