



# Lakeshore Weekly News

Covering The Greater Lake Minnetonka Area

9/24/2012 2:41:00 PM

## **City partners with U for sustainability projects**

*First-of-its-kind pilot project involves 150 students*

**By Barbara Champion**

The city of Minnetonka and the University of Minnesota launched a year-long partnership that will apply the expertise of university faculty and graduate students to several sustainability-related city projects.

U of M staff and students, as well of city staff and elected officials were on hand for the official kick-off of the Resilient Communities Project on Sept. 14 at the Minnetonka Community Center.

Approximately 150 students from 11 university graduate courses will work with Minnetonka staff to tackle projects identified by the city as important for the health of the community.

The areas they will be working in include architecture, law, urban planning, public policy, natural resources science and management, and bioproducts and biosystems engineering.

The project will provide students with the opportunity to apply their training to relevant real-world issues, while providing Minnetonka with research during an economically-difficult time.

"This project is not just only about sustainability but about making communities more resilient and able to weather the storm," said Minnetonka Community Development Director Julie Wischnack.

The city hasn't replaced staff who were laid off in 2009. Meanwhile, Wischnack said, "development has crept up again and building permits have crept up, and so the activity level is coming back quite a bit."

At the same time, Wischnack said, the city has strategic plan projects that need to be done.

The RCP will provide "a much more robust end product and probably a lot more research than we could do," said Wischnack.

Seven ongoing city projects are slated for inclusion for the fall semester.

Two U of M graduate schools, the School of Architecture and the Law School, will collaborate for a study of stormwater management as well as illicit discharge regulation and training.

Architecture students are tasked with looking at the stormwater runoff from Ridgedale Mall from a design viewpoint.

Students will look at the property and ask what happens to rainwater, what can be done to capture rainwater and how can rainwater be returned to the ground rather than entering the stormwater drainage system, according to Mike Greco, program manager for the RCP and communications coordinator for University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

Law students are tasked with looking at the Ridgedale Mall stormwater runoff from a legal compliance standpoint.

In addition, the law students are auditing the stormwater rules in Minnetonka to verify that the rules are in compliance with state regulations.

Students will create and implement a methodology for evaluating the impacts that past public development projects had on neighborhoods and adjoining areas.

The aim of the project is to evaluate the aftermath of a project to determine if it accomplished its goals and if additional information should have been provided during the public process.

Other projects slated for this fall include a study of density and housing options, water and energy conservation, surface water projection, a prioritization plan for water resources and a study of approaches to enhancing neighborhood identities through an evaluation of private associations.

Minnetonka is the first city to be selected to participate in the RCP. It was selected because of its commitment to sustainability and city staffs' willingness to commit the time needed to make the program work, according to Greco.

Because it is a pilot program, the year-long program is free to Minnetonka. In future years, cities will pay a fee to participate.

RCP is an initiative of the Sustainability Faculty Network, a U of M faculty network that includes faculty and staff members from colleges and schools across the U of M Twin Cities campus.