

Presentation to the Planning Department – City of Birmingham

Friday June 10th, 2022

Jim Hooker for EPCOTH22

The Experimental Prototype Community of Tiny Homes 22 – EPCOTH22 – (an acronym borrowed from a former employer) – describes a tiny home project conceived to address universal challenges associated with homelessness, affordable housing, and food insecurity – but specifically to Mayor Woodfin’s Plan for the City of Birmingham. There exists a growing paradigm change in values related to housing and community – particularly the way we live among and relate to one another. The “isolation factor” that began with the introduction of the suburbs model of housing creation – the garage on the street and the fenced back yard – has resulted in “the stranger on the street” being your next-door neighbor. Our larger homes and desire for privacy have resulted in increased insecurity and loss of cohesive civility.¹ Additionally, in America, the National Association of Home Builders reports that the average home size was 983 square feet in 1950 with 3.29 occupants (299sf per person) – and 2261 sf in 2021 with 2.51 occupants (900sf per person.)² There is room to downsize and re-engage.

In an effort to create safe, secure, and sustainable communities - architects and developers are adopting the inspiration of Ross Chapin, as beautifully revealed in his book “Pocket neighborhoods” (2011)³. Following his eight guidelines – the homes face onto a common space and designed with room size front porches to encourage relationship building – where a “common house” acts as a shared expansion of the tiny home’s living space – and a place to gather for meals and neighborhood meetings. Many of these neighborhoods incorporate community gardens – both ornamental and food producing for their mutual benefit. By limiting the size of these neighborhoods – a powerful sense of mutual support and care provide a greater sense of security. By including varying sizes of homes appealing to different family composition and requirements for phases of life demands – diverse communities enrich the lives of the residents. The EPCOTH22 campus is large enough to create many prototype “pocket communities” where style and costs vary according to market demands – and with onsite existing structures perfectly suited to design/build capabilities – producing jobs and revenues to sustain the campus. These will become the examples municipal regulators around the country will be able to view as they attend seminars to learn tried and true solutions to implementation in their cities.

Due to codes and zoning restrictions formulated during the great middle-class expansion of the housing stock – tiny homes face NIMBY resistance to inclusion in established neighborhoods – even when blight and crime and economic woes have diminished access to affordable housing. EPCOTH22 seeks to counter the NIMBY resistance with an ambitious project designed to illustrate the benefits of the tiny home inclusion through a best practice “research campus” addressing everything from municipal codes and zoning amendments – to design and construction of the tiny homes – and to the need for urban gardening to combat the food deserts that currently inhibit access to healthy local sources of nutrition.

¹ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-social-policy/article/abs/civility-community-cohesion-and-antisocial-behaviour-policy-and-social-harmony/58FFE9AC8ED752F73E760B10819CACC4>

² <https://www.insofast.com/explore/going-small-the-tiny-house-movement.html>

³ <https://rosschapin.com/category/pocket-neighborhoods-blog/>

Addressing Mayor Woodfin's initiative to provide high-performing "21st Century" education and workforce development systems – an extraordinarily successful model exists in Austin, Texas. Students enrolled in the Building Construction Technology Program at ACC Round Rock Campus and local businesses in partnership with the Home Builders Association of Greater Austin are designing and building tiny homes with enormous success. Framers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and other skilled contractors are working with the students who are gaining the skills and knowledge to pursue careers in those specialties.⁴

Urban gardening is rapidly becoming part of the solution to the food desert that exists within most major cities – and Birmingham is in a unique position to utilize abandoned campuses across the city to address this challenge. Modern approaches to farming include greenhouses of hydroponics, aeroponics, aquaponics, as well as raised beds of actual soil. In the ground techniques are being developed and tested around the country (world) from "no till farming" to permaculture, from front yards to small acreage, and distributed through ACA subscriptions to farmers markets to farm stands. As the success of the enterprises grow – education and workforce development in this field will provide opportunities previously unavailable to the urban dweller. Farm management is a crucial skillset – from selecting and programming the varieties of vegetables that will be rotated through the beds from season to season – to the harvesting, cleaning, packaging and marketing prior to distributing the produce to the consumer – and ECOTH22 will provide that training. Graduates will find entrepreneurial opportunities as the networks of "urban mini-farms" and "pocket community gardens" find their place in the food chain and require professional management.

Additional opportunities for education and workforce development emanating from the farming operations will be a commercial kitchen adjacent to the "farm" providing chef training as well as resident meal planning and preparation classes. A commercial kitchen will provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to produce, package, and distribute their own menu of items – hiring those trained in a partnership with Jefferson State Community College's Culinary program – located scant miles away from the identified campus.

Ancillary to tiny home and food production will be grounds maintenance, B&B marketing, renting, and servicing, Public and School tours, seminars, volunteer activities, Social Media content creation, promotion, and capitalization, Industry standards amalgamation, archiving, dissemination and instruction, all requiring education and workforce development.

This proposal supports the Mayor's directive to create and promote an innovative and inclusive economy that generates and allows the creative class, start-ups, small businesses, and historically disadvantaged businesses to emerge, grow, and thrive while sustaining and supporting community-minded large employers, institutions, and corporations that create quality jobs. With the support of a highly effective, people first, smart government, local businesses, educational institutions, and the larger stakeholder community, ECOTH22 can put another star in Birmingham's constellation of accomplishments.

⁴ <https://sites.austincc.edu/newsroom/2014/11/26/bidding-underway-for-acc-student-built-tiny-house/>

YouTube has been a source of inspiration and knowledge for developing this proposal. Following is a partial list of channels grouped by subject matter comprising the overall project with its many facets.

TINY HOMES – POCKET NEIGHBORHOODS

ROSS CHAPIN – Pocket neighborhoods author, architect, planner, developer – the father of the movement

Urban planning of pocket cities Ross Chapin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bp4VuYDteg>

Pocket Neighborhoods | Ross Chapin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7TnrbMCLGY>

Famous Architect Ross Chapin Helping Us Design Migrating Culture Crossing – Mar 17, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTnEbDupCQY>

KIRSTEN DIRKSEN – perhaps the broadest coverage of alternative living – from tiny home to earth ship – around the world – a real “rabbit hole” – incorporating concepts to be demonstrated at EPCOT22.

How Pocket Hoods behaving like villages boost wellbeing – May 8, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TCYjw88JSY>

Bridge container home has cantilevered bedroom, 2 roof decks – March 2, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOm9tnlOQLM>

Rundown apartments reborn as food-forest coliving Agritopia -8 months ago

<https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/rundown-apartments-reborn-as-foodforest-coliving-agritopia/>

UPB SHED to HOUSE featuring Allison Lauderdale of Raymond, MS – May 11, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aV4tZfOlb7o>

Off-grid container home uses pulleys to lower/raise bed & deck – Jul 19, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQp9VGz5anI>

TINY HOUSE EXPEDITION – This couple – Alexis and Christian – tour the country in their tiny home and inform the viewer of the legal challenges of Tiny Home integration – and amazing successes.

Living Tiny Legally, Part 1 (Documentary)- Innovative Tiny House Zoning– 5 years ago

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfLAKgJGc2g>

Living Tiny Legally, Part 2 (Documentary) - Groundbreaking Tiny House Building Codes 5 yrs ago

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qDG8X83auU>

Smart Gen Z 1st Time Home Buyer Gets TINY HOUSE – affordable city life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgCOJUI0qll>

Clever Ideas for Kids in Tiny Houses – Tiny House Family Life! – Apr 15, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQgW2wYZTcM>

Superhost Artist Converts Garage into Vibrant Tiny Housee w/BIB profits – May 21, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYKej9Q4xno>

URBAN FARMING

Urban Farmer Curtis Stone – The star of urban farming – with interviews around the world featuring innovations maximizing crop production while sustainably nurturing the land.

Strategies For Managing Farm Production Live Q & A (Listen In) – May 13, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5N7qZtoi-E>

\$80,000 on Half an Acre Farming Vegetables - Profitable Mini-Farming with Curtis Stone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MNhtcagNO0>

Raised Beds vs In-Ground Beds – Sep 28, 2016

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MNhtcagNO0>

THIS IS HOW MY FARM WORKS! - \$100K on a quarter acre Aug 25, 2017

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbHwAfHQA9M&list=RDCMUC-BIDCX_nCLs_ZF9meYQbw&index=17

INFRASTRUCTURE

Andrew Millison – Professor in the Department of Horticulture – Oregon State University – with the best graphic illustrations explaining the benefits of Permaculture

How to Recycle Wastewater Using Plants

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-sRcVkJZ9yg>

PERMACULTURE PONDS: Why, Where & How Aug 23, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AadLCOqalFk>

How to Design a PERMACULTURE NEIGHBORHOOD – Sep 7, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9R-fAc0wl10>

HOMELESS COMMUNITY

Community First Village – perhaps the most successful and largest community totally focused on lifting the homeless to lives of dignity and promise -

Community First! Village

<https://mlf.org/community-first/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBJxvJ5hw0c>