

## **The Northside Tool Library**

*Proposal for the Sustainable Land Lab Competition - December 10, 2012*

St. Louis's incredible historic building stock is one of the city's most important assets, but in many parts of the city, it's crumbling right in front of our eyes - leading to lower property values, a drop in neighborhood pride, and flight from the neighborhood.

The terrific costs associated with maintaining and rehabilitating historic buildings plays a large role in this devastation. While tax credit programs have certainly been influential in promoting some rehabilitation and preservation projects, many buildings need just minimal maintenance and improvements to keep them attractive and useable. For many property owners, home improvements may be inconvenient or infeasible due to the cost of purchasing and maintaining their own collection of tools. Creating a shared resource that removes these barriers would empower residents and encourage them to contribute to making a more beautiful neighborhood, one building at time.

### **The Northside Tool Library**

In an effort to make home improvements easier and more cost effective, we'd like to create a space in Old North for a tool library that allows residents, property owners and community groups to borrow tools and supplies to rehabilitate and maintain their homes, gardens and public space. The library would also include demonstration space for workshops on home maintenance as well as informational resources for homeowners and contractors doing preservation work. Some projects that can be made possible with tools, resources, and training include winterization, historic restoration, and community improvement projects like seasonal clean-up days.

A tool library is a new concept to the St. Louis region but has been proven to work in cities all around the country, including many of comparable size and with similar challenges. For example, Columbus, OH; Kansas City, MO; and Buffalo, NY all have successful tool libraries. We have begun reaching out to them and have found myriad resources that would guide us in implementing a sustainable tool library including legal, financial, and maintenance considerations.

### **Implementation**

While the tool library wouldn't be exclusive to a particular neighborhood, we expect core participation to come from Old North St. Louis. With a neighborhood population of 1,286 people over the age of 18, we expect to maintain a robust yet sensible membership base. Based on our research of other tool libraries, we have found that it costs between \$10,000-20,000 on average to start a successful tool library. We would utilize the \$5,000 prize to leverage the necessary supplemental funds through donations, membership fees, grants and partnerships. We hope to get many of the tools and supplies donated from hardware stores and residents.

The tool library would include one or more lockable sheds to house and protect the tools as well as a covered demonstration space for holding workshops. A decorative lockable fence along the front and the back of the space would provide additional security and add to the beauty of the surrounding neighborhood. Our operations processes would include inventory tracking, a membership system, financial records, staffing, and community outreach and awareness. The tool library would be open approximately 10-12 hours a week with a majority of that time being on the weekend since that is when most home improvement projects are completed. Initially it would be staffed by volunteers, with the goal of hiring local residents in the future.

### **Community Involvement**

We are dedicated to developing a resource that is involved in the surrounding community and responsive to residents' needs. We will attempt to create partnerships with and support local businesses in the neighborhood,

especially the existing hardware store on 14th Street. Our kick-off event would be designed for the community, inviting them to help us build and paint the shed as well as beautify the space with plants and public art.

### Connection to Sustainability Plan

Our proposal directly addresses many of the objectives in the City of St. Louis's new Sustainability Plan especially in the functional area of **Urban Character, Vitality and Ecology**. Some of these include:

- **Objective B, Strategy 7: Encourage communities to improve their own neighborhood.** "...Conduct community cleansweeps and greening initiatives. Provide tools, supplies, and collection services to community groups."
- **Objective C, Strategy 1: Design public spaces and neighborhood streets as gathering spaces for people.** "... Locate any new civic institutions, such as governmental buildings, religious institutions, post offices, libraries, and public spaces in the heart of communities to improve accessibility and create a sense of community..."
- **Objective F, Strategy 5: Promote the redevelopment of historic homes and commercial properties.** "...Encourage the development of low income housing and entrepreneurial ventures in historic structures... Encourage adaptive/multi-functional new uses for existing historic buildings."
- **Objective H, Strategy 8: Enhance community cleaning and beautification efforts.** "Engage neighborhoods and community organizations in cleaning, greening, and reforestation initiatives..."

### Scalability and Replicability

The tool library is a flexible concept that can operate out of many types of structures and be easily customized to meet a community's changing needs. Replicating and scaling this idea throughout St. Louis could include:

- Growing an existing site by increasing the member base, number of tools and frequency of workshops.
- Opening new tool libraries in other neighborhoods that would be tailored to each community's needs.
- Starting a mobile unit that could travel to satellite locations to expand the reach of a hub location.
- Using technology such as websites and mobile apps to automate as much work as possible.

### Team Qualifications

Our five-person team brings a unique mix of formal education, passion, and experience that makes us an ideal group to develop this project as an example that could be replicated on vacant lots throughout the city.

- **Mike Brockman** - Completing a Master's of Urban Planning and Real Estate Development in December 2013. Interested in collaborative planning and building social capital in neighborhoods.
- **Colin Fiola** - Completing a Master's of Aerospace Engineering in May 2013. Professional experience with design-build construction. Interested in impacting STEM education for children.
- **Erika Kubsch** - Completing Master's of Urban Planning and Real Estate Development in May 2013. Experience as the director of a community development and urban revitalization organization.
- **Jake Narup** - Completing a Master's of Urban Affairs in May 2013. Areas of interest include community development and local economies.
- **Liz Pund** - Native St. Louisian with experience living and working in a variety of North and South American cities. Passionate about community development and urban revitalization.

### Conclusion

A tool library will be an affordable, impactful way to turn a vacant lot into an active space that benefits the community and provides residents with new opportunities to take pride in their homes and neighborhood.