

# SUSTAINABLE LAND LAB COMPETITION



## REFAB: A CREATIVE RE-USE PROJECT

### CONCEPT

Refab proposes to use Lot 6 as a multifunctional space that facilitates: the selective deconstruction of nearby dilapidated houses, the repurposing of salvageable materials, the training of a local workforce, and the creation of both permanent and temporary jobs while leaving behind a community-designed-and-built pocket park constructed from salvaged materials. Expanding outward from the site, Refab staff and Old North St. Louis community members will work to deconstruct homes that have crumbled beyond repair, effectively removing neighborhood nuisances while *legally* making the bricks, lumber, and other materials available for purchase by neighborhood rehabbers and creative-types. After nearly two years of community dialogue as to the future of Lot 6, Refab will facilitate the collective re-imagining of the lot as a pocket park, using materials from the neighborhood and already on site.

This project integrates strategies to address issues related to waste, art, economy, and community. Building materials are a major component of St. Louis area landfills; by deconstructing rather than demolishing homes in the neighborhood, many tons of material will be saved from the dump, and instead become a source of project revenue. The community of Old North St. Louis is strong and more engaged in their built environment than many other neighborhoods in North City. Refab welcomes this energy and will directly involve community members for the duration of this project by providing paid training opportunities for un/underemployed residents and facilitating the construction of a pocket park in the lot as the project moves locations.

Lot 6 is a large space with a mix of dirt, asphalt, and gravel, formerly used as a parking lot for the failed 14<sup>th</sup> Street Pedestrian Mall. This site would certainly not be suitable for agriculture and that mix will eventually need to be removed to accommodate any permanent solution, but, in the context of this project, that mix would be preferable to grass for the first year or more. The equipment used to deconstruct the dilapidated homes could easily remedy the situation when the time comes to install the pocket park.

The goals of this submission perfectly align with the mission of the Old North St. Louis Restoration Group and the Sustainability Plan for the City of St. Louis. Financial support already obtained by local and regional funders, including the St. Louis-Jefferson Solid Waste Management District and the St. Louis County Department of Health, will further offset the cost of the project.

This fully-replicable project will demonstrate that an organized effort to salvage, resell, and re-imagine building materials creates meaningful employment and training opportunities for members of the community, provides an opportunity for permanent community art, and beautifies a neighborhood. Upon successful completion of this project, the team will assess the option of scaling up the project to include operation out of a warehouse.

## TEAM QUALIFICATIONS

Refab is a new local nonprofit organization committed to promoting the collective and creative re-use of our built environment by deconstructing buildings otherwise slated for demolition, retraining community members for careers in green industry, and refabricating materials for resale. On the Land Lab team are Eric Schwarz, Founder + Executive Director of Refab, and Marty Chorkey, P.E., ENV PV, licensed engineer and sustainability consultant.

Eric has a diverse background in home construction, the arts, education, and recycling. While earning a B.A. in Mathematics, Eric spent an equal share of his time experimenting with paper, clay, and other recycled-content media. After spending nearly three years living abroad and teaching English, in Thailand, Colombia, South Korea, and Germany, Eric returned to St. Louis to pursue his passion for sustainability. In 2010, he became the first Sustainability Coordinator at Habitat for Humanity Saint Louis, where he developed the ReStore Recycling and Repurposed Garden Programs, coordinated and expanded the Deconstruction Program, and implemented sustainable best practices in the administrative offices and on the Old North St. Louis and Jeff-Vander-Lou build sites.

Off the clock, Eric serves as President of the Board for the St. Louis Teacher's Recycle Center and sits on the design committees of St. Louis Earth Day and EarthDance Farms. Passionate about the potential for waste materials to inspire creativity, Eric is also an exhibiting artist and fellow of the St. Louis Regional Arts Commission's place-based Community Arts Training Institute.

Marty is a professional engineer with experience designing a variety of structure types including buildings, bridges, port facilities, retaining walls, culverts and others. He holds both a B.S and M.S. in civil engineering and has pursued continuing education coursework in sustainability as well as community development. Through his volunteer efforts with Engineers Without Borders on a project in The Gambia, Africa, Marty gained valuable experience in community engagement and planning as well as low cost solutions to basic infrastructure needs. He also has experience with natural building materials including straw bale and cob construction.

As a leader in the civil engineering community regarding sustainability, Marty serves on the Structural Engineering Institute's national Sustainability Committee, he is the founding chair of the Sustainability Committee for the St. Louis Chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers, and he is a credentialed Sustainability Professional through the Institute for Sustainable Infrastructure's Envision program. Marty also sits on the design committee for EarthDance Farms and is currently developing a course in waste management and reduction for large civil infrastructure projects for the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Marty recently served as a Sustainability Intern for the Mayor of St. Louis and worked to propel efforts in green infrastructure, energy efficiency of buildings, and sustainability planning. Through this role, Marty also became quite familiar with the City's new Sustainability Plan.