

Mixed housing is the ticket for Green Bay (11.10.07)

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Mixed housing is the ticket for Green Bay
Consultant sees new housing need for low-income workers

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An idea to develop mixed housing on publicly owned land near the Brown County Mental Health Center is the kind of thing Green Bay needs to look at to remain a family-friendly, affordable community.

That's according to urban policy author and consultant David Rusk.

He provides urban policy advice to communities throughout the world and was in Green Bay this week at the invitation of JOSHUA, a coalition of faith-based groups in Brown County.

Rusk studied the Green Bay area's economy and its current housing market and found that its metropolitan area ranks 54th in the nation for its available affordable housing. That puts it behind the Appleton area, which ranks 20th, Rusk said.

Planners have been designing a community near the mental health center for people of various income levels, complete with grid-style streets, parks and storm-water ponds. The proposal calls for townhouses and single-family houses, County Planner Chuck Lamine said.

The goal is to design a plan, receive the necessary approvals and then bid it out so it can be built, he said. No timeline is set; the plan is only in the design stage.

Such a project not only helps provide solid neighborhoods, it also helps conform to people's life cycles, Rusk said. As people age, for example, they become less interested in maintaining large houses and large yards and can still find housing in their old neighborhoods that conform to their changing needs, he said.

The Green Bay area has plenty of older homes in older areas available, but it has a shortage of affordable new housing for low-income workers, Rusk said. That will lead to growth of blighted areas in the community unless it's addressed, he said.