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If King County's Greenbridge housing project succeeds in revitalizing White Center, the improvements might not be as remarkable as the government cooperation needed to make them happen.

Greenbridge is the name of the King County Housing Authority's effort to upgrade not just a cluster of dilapidated housing, but the surrounding neighborhood.

To be sure, dilapidated public housing is at the center of the project. The focal point is Park Lake Homes I, a 100-acre site with 569 units of barracks-like buildings built in 1942 as temporary housing for Boeing defense workers. After 62 years, decay has defeated various upgrades, and the temporary buildings are finally slated to come down next year. The first building permits are being submitted now for a variety of new housing styles on the rolling terrain.

But Greenbridge also involves moving a school, designing a massive drainage project and upgrading off-site apartment complexes and single-family homes.

To do all that, government agencies at several levels had to pool resources, concede authority and make exceptions to rules.

## Above and beyond

The starting point was a \$35 million grant in 2001 from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to initiate planning.

"It became apparent early on that to be successful in truly revitalizing what is King County's poorest community was way beyond the resources, the skill sets and even the mission of the housing authority," says Stephen Norman, the agency's executive director.

# Building partnerships

Greenbridge affordable-housing project provides blueprint for cooperation



GGLO RENDERING

As part of the Greenbridge housing project in Seattle's White Center neighborhood, the developers aren't just building apartments, but rebuilding an entire neighborhood, including a planned redevelopment of Eighth Southwest at Southwest 99th Street.

master planning purposes so that a new school could be built within the Greenbridge project.

Slated to open in mid-September, White Center Heights Elementary is being envisioned as a "community school," meaning

partnership with Seattle Power and Light and the city," says Norman. That resulted in \$2.5 million from weatherization and home-repair budgets. Now about 70 single-family homes in White Center have upgraded roofing, furnaces and flooring.

Two other targets were apartment complexes called The Cones and Mallard Lake, with 431 units between them. While they weren't public housing, "they were identified hands down by all our partners for being real problems," says Norman. Not only were they in bad physical shape, they were centers for drug dealing and other crime.

"Between those two properties we probably plunked in \$12 million," says Rhonda Rosenberg, director of communications for the housing authority. The agency headed a partnership that bought the complexes, renamed them, rehabbed the buildings and leased them to new management.

The Cones is now called Arbor Heights, and Mallard Lake has become Coronado Springs, complete with a YWCA job-training and skills-assessment center.

In some cases the housing authority stepped aside and let another organization take the lead. One instance involved the Annie E. Casey Foundation's efforts toward developing a multiple-service center in White Center that seemed to overlap some of the Greenbridge efforts.

"There was a fair amount of dialogue between the housing authority and the Casey Foundation and other players in terms of what services and partners should go where," says Norman. The housing authority decided to concentrate on other areas while the Casey Foundation continued its efforts.

## Top and bottom

"There's a strong set of peer connections between the leadership of the various institutions, and that's the key," Norman says.

But paths also had to be cleared at lower bureaucratic levels, says Anna Nelson, land use planner with law firm Beck & Gordon

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L.P. Her firm is representing the housing authority in its redevelopment of Park Lake Homes.

"In order to achieve the vision they wanted, they couldn't do that within the existing regulations. We realized that right off the bat," Nelson says.

King County's development and environmental codes called for a suburban approach in White Center, with big lots and private yards, not the dense community the housing authority envisioned.

Rezoning would have taken a long time, but Nelson learned that the county was discussing a special ordinance to allow demonstration projects for sustainable design.

"We saw it as an opportunity to partner," Nelson says. "We ended up getting a lot of flexibility through that ordinance."

Approved in April 2003, the Low Impact Development/Built Green Ordinance authorized Greenbridge and a pair of smaller projects to experiment with results-based design rather than going by the book.

"One of the things that really drove the design is the fact that there is a valley in the middle," says Jeff Foster, a senior associate with architecture firm GGLO. "Our team managed to find a way to divert water that would have collected there to the east side of the site."

That provided room for more services and buildings in the middle. But it required waivers to several sections of the land-use code covering density,

landscape and water use.

"King County's drainage requirements are really quite strict. While the county has really been a member of the team and try to bring this about, they really can't just cast aside county policies," says Foster, who praises Nelson for the flexibility she helped achieve.

Greenbridge also needed a waiver from the Department of Transportation.

"When you go by their street stan-

dards, you just can't do it," says Foster. The existing main street, for instance, operates more like a thoroughfare.

"The main street now is posted 25 (mph) but if you were on it you would think it was designed for someone to drive 55. It's wide open; there's no definition to it," says Foster.

GGLO wanted sidewalks to occasionally bulge into the travel lane, a visual cue for drivers to slow down. Yet the street also had to allow room for fire trucks and other emergency vehicles.

GGLO won on some features and compromised on others. The alleys ended up designed for 20 feet between parked cars, rather than the 12 feet GGLO originally proposed.

On the other hand, the designers were allowed to count some on-street parking toward the 1.7-space requirement for each housing unit.

"That one was really a long discussion with the county. We got it as a team — I really have to emphasize that," says Foster.

The team structure had to be spelled out, though.

"Certainly there was that commitment at the political level," Nelson says of the demonstration ordinance. "But when you got down to the front-line person, the person processing the permit, there was some hesitation."

The answer was a memorandum of understanding that set out a timetable for project review and a list of county personnel dedicated to Greenbridge to ensure consistency and familiarity with the project. That also was crucial for meeting deadlines required by state tax-credit funding and the HUD grant.

The memorandum was a big help, says Nelson: "Whenever the project manager ran into questions from staff, he had something to point to."

## Widespread impact

Cooperation had to extend far beyond White Center. Only 300 units of subsidized housing will replace the 569 Park Lake units coming down. They'll be mixed with about 300 for-sale homes and 400 units of "work-force" rental housing for people earning 40 percent to 50 percent of the area median income. The in-

HOUSING GREENBRIDGE	
2001	Planning begins with HOPE IV grant from Housing and Urban Development.
2003	Low-impact design ordinance passed.
2004	Environmental impact report is approved and first building permits are filed.
2005	Demolition to begin. Building expected to start on subsidized housing, work-force rental housing and single-family homes.
2006	First 240 units expected to be finished.
2008	Work-force rental housing to be finished.
2012	Single-family homes to be finished.

tent is to give Greenbridge more social stability.

The 268 low-income units not replaced in White Center will be made up in multiple locations throughout Seattle, including the more affluent Eastside.

"The notion of being able to broker areas such as the Eastside is fairly unusual," says Norman. "We had a very strong set of partners on the Eastside through a group called A Regional Coalition for Housing."

All the new units are to make up no more than 25 percent of any building they are in, and are to be lined up before anything is torn down at Park Lake Homes.

With only 3,300 units of public housing in all of King County, Park Lake Homes' 569 was far more than White Center's share. By upgrading some units in White Center and spreading out the rest, "it's got a whole bunch of lovely policy implications," says Rosenberg of the housing authority.

The biggest implication of all, however, may be that government can sometimes find the will to make its rules fit the project, instead of the other way around.