

Green Broad Ripple



Green Alleys

by Cortellini

I began this column in October Of 2006 thinking that once the benefits of Green were elucidated herein the community would rally around the concept and declare Broad Ripple a Green Community. Perhaps I was more than a little naive in this expectation because I am learning many are having trouble even just imagining what a Green Broad Ripple might look like. In this climate, projects that propose large steps toward sustainability, even though meritorious, have found and will probably continue to encounter opposition. Now as a matter of reference, I would like you to know that Patty (my wife) and I have taken to theaming the years of our lives as a means of becoming aware of the larger patterns that influence our "Quality of Life". The theme of this year is "Unrelenting Patience" which followed last year's; "Appropriate Selfishness." Since establishing 2007 as the year of "Unrelenting Patience", Patty and I have been amazed at the large number of opportunities that have presented themselves to practice this virtue. With this year's theme strongly influencing our posture, I and my Green friends (we) would like to propose a baby step; "Green Alleys." Here is the thinking:



Broad Ripple Alley Photo by Cortellini

As Patty and I walk the alleys of Broad Ripple regularly, we have come to the realization that alleys are an underappreciated and underutilized asset. They are wonderfully diverse spaces; sometimes very urban other times almost disappearing into nature. They provide glimpses of the more personal and informal ambience of our community. The "New Urbanism" has long espoused that alleys could lead to better integration of automobile and foot traffic. Where streets are primarily vehicular in nature accommodating pedestrian traffic to varying degrees, alleys could become primarily pedestrian spaces which accommodate the automobile. This could provide an alternative network for strolling, exercising and generally getting around.

Beyond the transportation and recreation possibilities, alleys, if they were Green, could provide more opportunities for a connection to nature while working to ameliorate drainage and sewer problems. Planting a greater variety of indigenous species could enliven the visual space with plants that are well adapted to the climate and would require little or no maintenance. Use of water management techniques such as rain gardens, eco-swales, and semi-permeable paving, while also enriching the visual experience, would, at the same time, ease the sewer burden by providing ways for storm water to return naturally to the aquifer.

Even this baby step will present some formidable challenges. The effort will require cooperation from the Mayor's Office, Department of Metropolitan Development, Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Police, Our Neighborhood Organizations, the City Council, surrounding neighbors, and agencies yet to be identified. It will require fund-raising. It will bring up issues of privacy, public safety and crime, and community responsibility. The process will test our patience as diverse views and interests bear on the related issues. It will not be easy. But it will bring us together to work out solutions to difficult problems that directly affect the "Quality of Life" in our community. This is what community building is all about.

We (Green Broad Ripple) propose an even smaller baby step. Before beginning a program to revitalize the alley network of Broad Ripple, we have in mind a particular section of alley that can be used as a test model. This may not only test the physical techniques of the reconstruction but also the process to bring the diverse interested parties together voluntarily to arrive at solutions that are mutually beneficial - mutually beneficial to all involved and to the planet as well. Completing a small section that can work out the logistical problems will provide concrete evidence for the evaluation of possibilities and give us confidence to take the next baby step. It may also give us reason to consider 2008 as the year of "Effective Perseverance."