

**Office of the Mayor
Gary Becker**



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June 29, 2007

Selection Committee
Small Cities Sustainability Award
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative
177 North State Street, Suite 500
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Selection Committee:

Please accept the attached proposal for consideration of the 2007 *Small Cities Sustainability Award*.

The City of Racine is committed to the preservation of Great Lakes St. Lawrence water resources and as such desires to incorporate the principles of sustainability into all aspects of how we do business whether that be in recreational opportunities for our citizens, educational programs for our school children, or in new construction and city redevelopment plans. Economic vitality is necessary for small municipalities to retain and attract young professionals and an active business community but the way in which we grow must be sensitive to the needs of the environment. The Root River Environmental Education Center (REC) is just one example of how we, as a small city, are trying to meet these goals. The REC offers recreational outlets and environmental education to traditionally underserved populations (improving social equity), serves as the base of operations for water quality research projects designed to provide information relevant to the scientific community, educators (environmental stewardship), and redevelopment projects which will incorporate features to improve the water quality of the Root River, a major tributary to Lake Michigan (economic vitality and environmental sustainability).

If selected, the City of Racine would use the monetary award to plant native vegetation in the vicinity of the REC to reduce the impacts of storm water and serve as a hands-on activity for area school children, support the SWIMR (Safe Water Is My Responsibility) program which provides annual environmental education activities related to Great Lakes water quality to fourth and fifth graders, set up permanent water quality monitoring stations on the Root River to assess water quality improvements as environmental protection measures are implemented (also an opportunity for hands-on environmental education), and host an open house to attract additional attention and support of the REC from the minority, urban population which reside in its immediate vicinity.

Thank you for considering our proposal. In my absence please contact Dr. Julie Kinzelman (262-636-9501) will any questions you may have regarding this project.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Becker".

Gary Becker
Mayor, City of Racine, Wisconsin

Small Cities Sustainability Best Practices Award Proposal Submitted by City of Racine, Wisconsin, US

The City of Racine (population 82,517) and the University of Wisconsin-Parkside have established Root River Environmental Education Center (REC) on the Root River, an important tributary to Lake Michigan. If Racine is selected, the award monies would be used for environmental monitoring and demonstration projects, educational activities, and to increase public awareness of the REC.

The REC addresses an urgent need to improve social equity and connect urban individuals to the environment where they live, work, and recreate. While many urban and/or minority/low-income residents do not recognize nor appreciate the natural features that are often obscured by highly developed neighborhoods they often depend on public access to parks, beaches, and the river for recreation. Additionally, there is a lack awareness of how human activities impact environmental integrity, i.e. recreational water quality and habitat. The REC provides a venue to disseminate this important information within a context that allows for direct interaction with natural surroundings. With the increasing discovery of environmental degradation, the negative effects of climate change, and the impact of pollution on the Great Lakes it is more important than ever to educate the public and encourage individuals to engage in lifestyles that lead to sustainable environments.

Education and demonstration projects will inform the public about the impact of storm water runoff as it relates to water quality (and the benefits of mitigation measures such as rain gardens), geologic/hydrologic evolution of the Great Lakes, ecologic and environmental issues, recreation and economic resources, transportation and commerce history, and commercial and sports fishing. Through these activities the REC has the potential to serve as an implementation mechanism for *Wisconsin's Great Lakes Protection and Restoration Strategy* (2006) and potentially address priorities articulated by the *Council of Great Lakes Governors* (<http://www.cglg.org/>) and echoed by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. For example, education and demonstration efforts will ensure that the public, including underrepresented minority groups, understand the importance of adopting "*sustainable use practices that protect environmental resources and may enhance the recreational and commercial value of our Great Lakes*" (CGLG, Priority 7). Educational activities will also be tied to current research activities occurring in Racine such as the current baseline assessment of the bacteriologic and chemical integrity of the Root River (this project has the additional benefit of serving as a knowledge base for economic and redevelopment plans along the Root River corridor within the City of Racine which include design elements capable of improving water quality). The unique location of the REC center also offers opportunities for urban families to experience recreational activities highlighting the Great Lakes through the REC connection to the Root River and Lake Michigan pathways (bicycle, canoe, and kayak rentals will be available during the recreation season).

Racine wishes to promote sustainability within our community and engage traditionally underrepresented individuals in environmental issues. An interested and engaged population possesses civic pride, embodies the spirit of stewardship, enhances the economic vitality of the community, and values GLSL water resources as capital assets with intrinsic value worthy of protection.