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Nebraska's Community Leaders to Tackle Sustainability Leadership Issues

OMAHA —Erosion from new subdivisions under development, rising energy costs, transportation issues, business district development stagnation, flooding and stormwater run-off, landfill issues, water quality, access to technology—these are just some of the issues facing mayors, city councils, school boards, and county officials throughout Nebraska.

The Nebraska Sustainability Leadership Workshop (NSLW), a series of 20 workshops for civic leaders throughout the state, is now under way to address their communities' specific priorities, and to help them learn how these priorities can be addressed through using sustainability practices. The mission of the NSLW is to help community leaders throughout the state craft shared visions for economic opportunities, efficient resource use, environmental quality, alternative energy, effective public policy, healthy and vibrant cities, and food-based coalitions.

The first two-day workshops will be held October 30 and 31 in Omaha, and November 6 and 7 in Lincoln. Future workshops are planned for Alliance, Broken Bow, Grand Island, Holdrege, McCook, Norfolk, North Platte, O'Neill, Sidney, and Valentine.

"While invited civic and community leaders will be given precedence, anyone who is interested in sustainability and would like to attend the workshops should contact us," said Katie Torpy, program manager. "In some cases, we can make accommodation for individuals interested in building sustainability in their communities."

The civic leaders attending the workshops have been specially chosen to represent their communities. They bring to the workshops particular priorities in their communities, and the NSLW pairs them up with experts in the field to help them find ways to meet to their critical challenges. Among the rotating panel of experts available for the workshops are engineers, attorneys, architects, agronomists, eco-tourism and agri-tourism consultants, hydrologists, and many others. These experts/consultants are being provided at no charge to the attending civic leaders.

"Our community leaders are the chief designers of our communities and their component parts—central business districts, subdivisions, schools, industries and highways—and hold significant influence over current and future

public policies,” said W. Cecil Steward, the founder of the NSLW and president of the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities. “Civic leaders hold enormous sway over whether or not a new development is a good fit that brings long-term economic benefits without harming the ecological or cultural fabric of the community.

“The NSLW is part of a new partnership program that is preparing Nebraska’s communities for today’s and tomorrow’s complex ecological challenges,” Steward said.

He said that an uncertain energy future, growing shortages of water and other natural resources, and the unfolding consequences of climate change “represent daunting challenges for Nebraska’s community leaders.”

“Whether they live and work in sprawling cities or depopulating towns, all are struggling with myriad priorities as natural resources become increasingly scarce while demands on resources continue to rise,” Steward said.

Among other key components of the workshops will be new ways of looking at and measuring sustainability, and ways of enhancing leadership practices in addressing issues of sustainability in the participants’ communities.

The Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities, primary sponsor of the workshops, has received funding of \$200,000 from the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund to support the creation of this unique forum for community leaders to explore solutions to environmental challenges. Initially the program will run for two years under NETF funding, plus matching grants.

More information and updates on the NSLW can be found on the web site www.nslw.org.

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Biographical Background

W. Cecil Steward, FAIA, is a world expert on sustainable development and sustainable design. Dean emeritus and emeritus professor of architecture and planning at the University of Nebraska College of Architecture in Lincoln, he is president and founder of the International North/North Network for Urban Sustainability and the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities, Omaha/Lincoln. A past president of the national American Institute of Architects (AIA), Steward has served on the boards of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, the AIA and on the charter board of the Architectural Research Centers Consortium. He serves on the boards of directors of the Asia/Pacific Center for Architecture, the national Design Futures Council, and the steering committee of the United Nations Center for Human Settlements Best Practices Network and its international Dubai Award for Best Practices in Sustainable Development, among others.

In public service he is a former member of the Board of Directors of the Downtown Lincoln Association, the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Commission, and the Lincoln Children’s Museum Board of Directors. In 2005, he

started the Nebraska Center for Sustainable Construction, which operates a recycled building materials store in Lincoln, Nebraska. He is a member of the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission where he assisted in the writing of the first design guidelines for urban protection of the Nebraska Capitol building.

At the national level he has served on the National Easter Seals Advisory Committee, on the national Peer Review Committee for design reviews of selected General Services Administration projects, and as a member of the Pennsylvania Avenue Design Charrette Team in Washington, D.C.

At the international level he served as a member of the National Committee on U.S./China Relations, and the UNESCO-sponsored design charrette team for the international Memorial to West African Slave Trade, Dakar, Senegal. Since 1984, he has served as a consultant to the Peoples Republic of China in establishing accreditation and licensing for architects.

More information on the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities can be found on the web site: www.ecospheres.com.

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