



St. Louis Association Gets Creative in Spurring Energy Efficient Housing Designs – *May 2014*

Successful projects benefit from a solid foundation, an abundance of expertise, and a bright idea. In this case, the St. Louis Association of REALTORS® (SLAR) had it all, and it began with one member.

Eric Friedman is an energetic champion of sustainable housing and development in St. Louis, having founded and/or governed numerous local organizations. As President of Housing and Community Solutions, Inc. (HCSI), Friedman counts SLAR and the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® as natural partners in the development of sustainable housing.

At the time HSCI was wrapping up Walk/Live St. Louis 2012, an ambitious SLAR/NAR/HSCI initiative with Dan Burden of Walklive.org, promoting the healthful evolution of St. Louis communities by making them more walkable and safe, and by extension, more competitive, sustainable and marketable to individuals and businesses, Dawn Kennedy took over the reins as CEO of the 7,100-member St. Louis Association. Walk/Live appealed greatly to Kennedy, who doesn't like driving to begin with. But avoiding the St. Louis freeway and driving the length of once-beautiful, now-deteriorating Page Avenue to get downtown actually hurt, she says. "Those lovely old homes seemed to be crying out for someone to save them. As all REALTORS® know, it does no good for a property to sit empty, and this was blight on a heart-breaking scale."

She mentioned her dismay to a small core group of SLAR members who were discussing ways to build on the success of Walk/Live St. Louis 2012 and Dan Burden's concepts. Friedman had an idea: a contest to highlight housing sustainability, an aspect sure to resonate with young and future homebuyers. While such a contest would only have an immediate impact on a few of the 2,725 vacant buildings and the 8,153 lots owned by the city, it would raise awareness and provide models for energy efficient housing in St. Louis and beyond.

SLAR was awarded a \$15,000 Smart Growth Action Grant to conduct its Energy Efficient Housing Contest, announced at the February 2013 National New Partners for Smart Growth conference in Kansas City, Missouri. It garnered the support of the city and county governments (separate entities) and non-profit organizations, and received co-sponsorships from industry partners. Friedman used his contacts in the city and the county to secure vacant lots to award as prizes for the best design submitted by a contestant with county funding in hand to construct the project. Cash prizes were given to the two best sustainable design-only entries. A net-zero new construction home and a historic rehab with a 50 HERS rating also won first prizes in their categories.

SLAR's Energy Efficient Housing Contest website provided a one-stop platform for information on rebates and resources for contestants and consumers alike. The public awards presentation took place in January 2014 at the Washington University School of Architecture, with the County Executive and Aldermen attending, amidst booths manned by SLAR and its co-sponsors and partners, and models entered in the competition. SLAR is holding a second event in June featuring a panel of community stakeholders discussing sustainability. The NAR Smart Growth



for the 21st Century Class and other continuing education programs will be offered to members eager to learn about buying and selling sustainable housing. "We're inviting industry partners like the Home Builders and the Appraisers, in the interests of sharing our resources to move everyone forward together," says Kennedy.

She and her team have created a template documenting their process, to help other associations interested in launching sustainable design contests of their own. In hindsight, Kennedy believes that, while being able to offer the prize of a vacant lot was powerful incentive for contestants with construction funding, a contest for Rehabilitation and Design Only would be just as successful -- and much easier to get off the ground. "We wouldn't want others to be daunted by the notion that such complex prizes were essential," she notes.

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of St. Louis are helping their city move away from blight and towards the development of energy-efficient housing, contact Dawn Kennedy, Chief Executive Officer of the St. Louis Association of REALTORS®, at dkennedy@stlrealtors.com or 314.576.0033. Read about [SLAR's last Smart Growth Project – one to promote walkable communities.](#)



Examples of some of the vacant properties contestants worked with to create their housing designs:

